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**WAR**

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# == GREATEST == MILITARY DISASTERS

HOW HUBRIS AND HEROISM SHAPED SOME OF HISTORY'S KEY BATTLES



Digital  
Edition

FUTURE  
FIRST  
EDITION

CANNAE • JINGXING • TEUTOBURG FOREST • HATTIN • GALLIPOLI • DUNKIRK





# RETREAT! FALL BACK!

**I**t could be argued that if two armies are forced to meet in battle then several small disasters must already have occurred, namely the failure of reason or diplomacy to prevent the inevitable death and destruction that accompanies any clash of arms. However, a battle can always be turned into an ever-bloodier debacle by inadequate planning and incompetent leadership, and both certainly had a major impact on the course of the engagements that we are about to explore.

From the slaughter of 50,000 Romans at Cannae to Napoleon's ill-fated march on Moscow, the disastrous Gallipoli Campaign and the failure of Operation Market Garden, the list of tragedies that can be levelled at arrogance and poor intelligence is as long as it is gruesome. Prepare to pick your way through some of the most infamous battlefields in history.



# **== GREATEST == MILITARY DISASTERS**

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# ANCIENT ANARCHY

## 10 BATTLE OF CANNAE

Confident that their superior numbers would crush Hannibal's forces, two rival Roman commanders refused to work together, with devastating results

## 14 BATTLE OF JINGXING

Confronted by an army six times the size of his, Han Xin resorted to drastic measures to inspire his men to fight. They would respond by inflicting the most stunning defeat in the history of China

## 18 CRASSUS' DOOMED CAMPAIGN

Craving ever more fame and fortune, Rome's richest man ignored several warnings as he marched his legions to their death

## 22 THE BETRAYAL OF ROME

Blind faith in a land seething with hostile barbarians cost Rome dearly in September 9 CE









### AN ABSENCE OF ELEPHANTS

While it is well known that Hannibal successfully brought a herd of war elephants over the Alps (37 to be precise), these lumbering beasts were in fact only used at the Battle of the Trebia in 218 BCE. They had all but perished by the time the Carthaginian general prepared to fight at Cannae.

### SPEED OVER SUBSTANCE

Much of Hannibal's army was lightly armoured, a force built more for speed and agility than crushing power. The ability of the mixed soldiers under Hannibal's command to outmanoeuvre their Roman adversaries ultimately led to a bloodbath of epic proportions.

### MID-AFTERNOON MASSACRE

As predicted by the former Roman dictator Quintus Fabius Maximus, the Battle of Cannae was a catastrophe for Rome, with approximately 50,000 men being slaughtered and 20,000 taken prisoner. Only about 14,000 soldiers managed to escape.



# BATTLE OF CANNAE

ITALY, 2 AUGUST 216 BCE

WORDS CHARLES GARDINER

## RINGS OF DEATH

Among the slain Romans lay several hundred knights – elite soldiers who wore golden rings to distinguish themselves. These glistening status symbols were pried from their bloodied hands and taken to Carthage, where Mago poured them out onto the floor of the Senate building to a hail of applause.

In one of the bloodiest battles in ancient history, Rome confronted its greatest foe, Hannibal, at Cannae, in an effort to halt the Carthaginian commander's invasion of Italy. Hannibal had the Roman Republic on the back-foot from the get-go, destroying the Roman-aided city of Saguntum in Iberia (modern-day Spain) in 219 BCE, before shocking the world by crossing the treacherous slopes of the Alps to enter Italy with an army and 37 elephants the following year. He quickly defeated the Romans at Trebia and Lake Trasimene, inflicting losses of 43,000 men.

A panicked Senate appointed a dictator – a ruler temporarily entrusted with absolute power during an emergency – by the name of Quintus Fabius Maximus to take control. However, Maximus was wary of meeting Hannibal in open combat and favoured sending armies into the countryside to fall upon any towns that supported Rome's nemesis. He believed that this, coupled with depriving supplies and little hope of reinforcement, would fatally weaken Hannibal. Unfortunately for Maximus, his pragmatic approach did not go down well with many lambasting him as a 'cunctator' (delayer).

Exploiting the growing fissures in Roman command, Hannibal cunningly ordered his men to spare any property belonging to Maximus while incinerating the homes of the rest of the political elite. This ploy resulted in accusations of treason being levelled at Maximus, who struggled to convince his peers that he had not made a secret pact with the Carthaginian devil.

In 217 BCE, the Senate elected to replace Maximus with two consuls – Lucius Aemilius Paullus and Gaius Terentius Varro – who would take joint command of 80,000 men, one of the largest Roman armies assembled to date.

The two sides met in August 216 BCE. Hannibal, who by this time had lost an eye in a skirmish, was the first to arrive with his 50,000-strong army at the battle site outside the village of Cannae, in south-eastern Italy. As well as allowing him to seize control of the grain silo that was there, Hannibal dominated the River Aufidus, the main water source in the area. While Paullus deemed it foolish to fight Hannibal on an open plain when the Carthaginian possessed a larger, more superior cavalry, Varro was so determined to snatch glory that he commanded his men to form ranks beyond the south bank of the river. This forced the already hungry and thirsty army to approach with the hot wind in their faces – blowing dust and grit into their eyes – a disadvantage that cannot be ignored.

The battle that followed was a disaster for Rome, with up to 50,000 troops slaughtered in a simple yet brilliant encirclement. It had a devastating impact on Roman society, with a day of mourning declared and the city apparently resorting to human sacrifices to appease the gods and rescue the situation. Despite having such a dangerous enemy on their doorstep, the Romans refused to surrender and – thanks to its vast wealth and manpower – ultimately won the Second Punic War, sending Hannibal skulking back to Carthage in 203 BCE.



## Carthage

**TROOPS:** 40,000  
**CAVALRY:** 10,000



## HANNIBAL BARCA

### WEAKNESS

Allegedly compelled as boy by his father Hamilcar to pledge his life to the destruction of Rome, Hannibal grew into a brilliant commander. **Strength:** Hannibal managed to forge a rag tag group of mercenaries and foreign troops into a ruthless fighting machine.

**Weaknesses:** Far from home and with little hope of being reinforced, it was all or nothing for Hannibal.



## NUMIDIAN CAVALRY

### KEY UNIT

Described by Livy as "by far the best horsemen in Africa", Numidian riders shunned saddles, commanding their steeds with a rope around the neck.

**Strength:** Fast and agile, the Numidian cavalry was able to outmanoeuvre opponents before wheeling away from any reprisals.

**Weaknesses:** If these riders were unhorsed by opponents they would be extremely vulnerable.



## SLINGSHOT

### KEY WEAPON

Famed for their skill, Balearic slingers constructed their weapons of choice from a type of rush, meaning they were relatively quick, easy and cheap to make.

**Strength:** Deadly at ranges of up to 400 metres, slings could exceed the distance achieved by a bow.

**Weaknesses:** Slingshots were probably not particularly effective if they struck armour.

## 01 STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Confident that nothing can withstand the sheer weight of the largest Roman army ever assembled, Gaius Varro orders his infantry to adopt a tighter, deeper formation than the one usually deployed by Roman armies. While this makes for an awesome vision of Roman might, it fatally constricts the space in which the infantry can manoeuvre and fight, compressing it into a narrow wedge that can only march forwards.

## 02 CAUTION THROWN TO THE WIND

The glory hungry Varro orders his army to cross to the south bank of the Aufidus River, a position that, once they face west, places the sea behind them. Committing the cardinal sin of war, Varro has allowed Hannibal to fight the battle on his terms: his men having to march into a hot southerly wind.

## 03 THE TRAP IS SET

Hannibal opts to use the Roman infantry's size against it. Distributing his infantry (largely Gauls and Spaniards) in a thin convex line facing the enemy, Hannibal moves his light troops (slingers and spearmen) to form up behind them. He then positions his heavy African infantry and mercenaries in reserve before placing his Spanish cavalry on the left under the command of his brother Hasdrubal and his Numidian horsemen to the right under his nephew Hanno.

## 04 A LETHAL LURE

Leading from the centre alongside Mago, another of his siblings, Hannibal sallies forth to provoke the Roman hordes and ensure that they march directly towards his centre.

## 05 CLASH OF THE CAVALRY

As the two sets of infantry meet in the centre a vicious fight ensues on the flanks as the opposing cavalry collide. The Spanish horsemen career into their Roman counterparts and rout them before wheeling around to help their Numidian comrades finish off the doomed riders under the command of Varro.

## 06 A MEASURED WITHDRAWAL

Believing it is rolling up a weakening opponent, the Roman infantry surges forward. Hannibal orders some of his men to begin a withdrawal, allowing fresh ones to come in – a ploy that sucks the enemy troops into the jaws of death.





## 10 HANNIBAL'S CAPTIVES

After the battle approximately 20,000 Romans find themselves in Hannibal's custody, who is quick to stress that he is not in Italy to destroy Rome – rather, he wishes to emancipate the Italians under Roman control and restore Carthage's honour. However, Rome does not wish to entertain talk of peace on Hannibal's terms, a rejection that so enrages the African commander that he forces his prisoners to fight one another to the death.

## 09 THE CIRCLE CLOSES

With his enemy exactly where he wants it, Hannibal presses the advantage, his men methodically cutting down their terrified opponents with ruthless efficiency. The killing takes a day, claiming the lives of around 50,000 Romans, including 80 senators and Lucius Paulus. Varro, who had been so sure of victory, flees to Rome.

## 08 HANNIBAL'S CAVALRY RETURNS

Having put their opponents to flight, Hanno and Hasdrubal turn their steeds back towards the main battle. Thousands of hooves beat the dry ground as the agile Spanish and Numidian cavalry charge for the Roman rear, crashing into the exposed foot soldiers unfortunate enough to find themselves stationed at the back of an army that is now surrounded on all sides. The folly of Varro's formation is brutally revealed.

## Rome

**TROOPS:** 80,000  
**CAVALRY:** 6,400

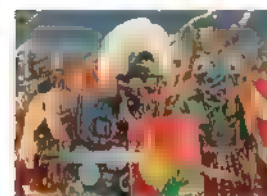
## GAIUS TERENTIUS VARRO

### LEADER

Gaius Varro possessed all the desire but none of the talent or experience required to competently confront Hannibal.

**Strengths:** Utterly determined to end the threat posed by Hannibal, Varro marched out to face a general who had yet to taste defeat.

**Weaknesses:** Varro ignored his more cautious fellow commander's decision that ultimately led to the massacre of an entire army.



## INFANTRY

### KEY UNIT

The heart of any Roman army, the infantry was a well-oiled, highly disciplined machine capable of systematically cutting through a far larger army.

**Strengths:** The soldiers at Cannae were fighting to save a Roman city which instilled a gritty determination in the ranks.

**Weaknesses:** Due to severe losses in manpower, the army that marched to Cannae was mostly comprised of raw recruits.

## PILUM

### KEY WEAPON

With a head of strong steel and a shaft comprised of lighter steel, this ingenious weapon could be used in close-quarters fighting or launched at the enemy.

**Strengths:** With a weight of up to five kilograms and a pyramidal head, the pilum could puncture both armour and shields.

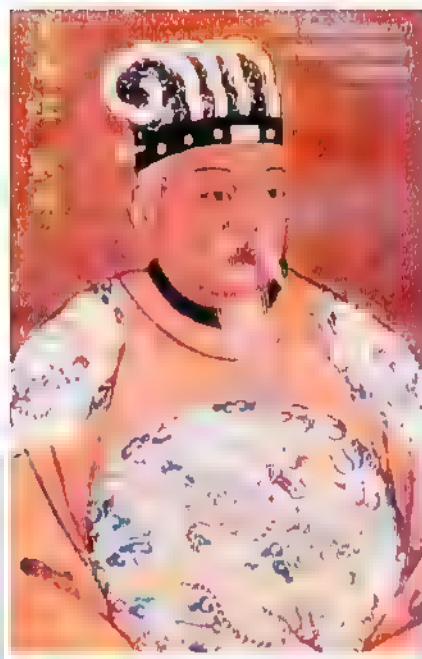
**Weaknesses:** While its weight made it a lethal missile, the pilum would have proved heavy to wield in prolonged hand-to-hand fighting.

# BATTLE OF JINGXING

JINGXING PASS, CHINA, OCTOBER 205 BCE

Strategic brilliance and an audacious plan ensured victory for the underdog in this legendary clash in ancient China

WORDS NEIL CROSSLEY



**W**hen it comes to assessing the causes of military disasters over the ages, one that appears time and again is the capacity of military leaders to underestimate their enemies.

This was the case in October 205 BCE, when the combined forces of the Zhao army took on the much smaller force of the Han army in the rugged Taihang Mountains of northwest China.

The battle was catastrophic for the Zhao army which was outwitted, outmanoeuvred and annihilated by a Han force less than one-sixth its size. The general commanding the Han army was Han Xin

a mercurial character who would go on to become the greatest military strategist in Chinese history. Han Xin's strategy that day would become the stuff of legend. It's a credit to him that over two millennia later, the Battle of Jingxing is remembered for the audacious brilliance of his battle plan.

## The Warring States

The Battle of Jingxing took place towards the end of a period of ancient Chinese history known as the Warring States. This was an era defined by military conflict and rife with fractured alliances, scurrilous betrayals and fervent territorial ambition. Sixteen

China's Taihang Mountains, scene of the battle of Jingxing between the Han and Zhao armies in 205 BCE





years prior to the battle. In 221 BCE, the Qin dynasty had been established as the first dynasty of a unified Imperial China. But by 208 BCE, the Qin had been overthrown by a rebellion.

In 207 BCE, one of the rebels, a noble called Xiang Yu, asserted his leadership of the rebel armies and joined forces with the anti-Qin leader Liu Bang. Xiang Yu and Liu Bang teamed up to overthrow the Qin, but their allegiance was to be short-lived. By 205 BCE they were at war with each other for control of China.

### The Battle of Pengcheng

Liu Bang's military aspirations did not start well. In

April 205 BCE he suffered a major defeat by Xiang Yu at the Battle of Pengcheng, when 100,000 of his panicked, retreating troops were driven into the waters of the Su Shi River and massacred. According to *Records of the Grand Historian* by Chinese astrologer and historian Sima Qian, the corpses were so numerous that they blocked the river's flow.

To add to Liu Bang's woes, his father and wife had been taken as hostages, and the states of Wei, Dai and Zhao defected to Xiang Yu. But Liu Bang had a major asset within his ranks – a soldier called Han Xin, who would help transform Liu Bang's fortunes.

**“THE BATTLE OF JINGXING TOOK PLACE TOWARDS THE END OF A PERIOD OF CHINESE HISTORY KNOWN AS THE WARRING STATES – AN ERA DEFINED BY MILITARY CONFLICT”**



A political map of China during the Warring States period circa 260 BCE

## Gifted strategist

Han Xin had initially joined Xiang Liang's rebel army and had repeatedly suggested strategies only to be consistently ignored. In 206 BCE, the exasperated Han Xin deserted Xiang Liang and went to join Liu Bang. For a time he fared no better, and within months he was facing execution for violating military law. He only escaped by speaking forthrightly to one of Liu Bang's trusted generals minutes before the axe came down. "I thought the king wanted to rule an empire," implored Han Xin. "Why is he killing valiant men then?"

The general spared his life and recommended him to Liu Bang. Han Xin was eventually promoted to the rank of general and he immediately set his sights on conquering the kingdoms of northern China. He formulated a strategy to secure the manpower, food and wealth of northern China for Liu Bang while keeping Xiang Yu distracted in China's Central Plain

moved northeast, conquering the states of Wei and Dai. His next objective was the kingdom of Zhao. His ambitions suffered a blow when Liu Bang ordered that most of Han Xin's elite soldiers be sent south to assist in the Xinyang-Chenggao theatre. Han Xin complied but despite now leading a seriously depleted and largely untrained army, he refused to abandon the attack on Zhao state.

He proceeded eastward towards the Taihang Mountains, at the end of which lay Jingxing Pass, a point of entry into the Zhao heartland. Meanwhile, the large royal army of Zhao, led by Zhao Xie and Chen Yu positioned itself at the eastern end of the long, narrow pass ready to defend the Zhao kingdom. The Zhao forces numbered 200,000. Han Xin had just 30,000.

## The path ahead

But Han Xin had luck on his side. One of the Zhao warlords had advised Chen Yu to block off important routes across the Taihang Mountains, especially the Jingxing Pass, to cut off Han Xin's rear once he had entered the mountains. But Chen Yu was a follower

of Confucianism and prided himself on commanding with righteousness. He responded that he had no desire to win through dishonourable means and had no need for such a strategy anyway, since his army was so superior to that of Han Xin.

It was a catastrophic decision. Had Chen Yu followed the advice then Han Xin's army far from home, would have been beset by logistical problems and disintegrated. Han Xin learned of this decision from one of his spies in the Zhao camp. This lack of intervention left the path open for him to set in motion a plan that was as audacious as it was astute.

## A daring deployment

Once the forces of Han Xin were within the Jingxing Pass, they saw the Zhao army encamped on the plain to the east. In the middle of the night, Han Xin sent 2,000 hand-picked light cavalry to exit the Taihang Mountains along a goat track and find a position that overlooked the Zhao army, behind their encampment. He gave them orders to seize the Zhao camp when the opportunity presented itself.

*Qin Shi Huang ordered the construction of the Great Wall of China to begin in 221 BCE*





## “JUST BEFORE DAWN, HAN XIN ENSURED HIS TROOPS ATE A SIMPLE BREAKFAST, ADDING THAT THEY WOULD FEAST UPON DESTROYING THE ZHAO ARMY”

Just before dawn, Han Xin ensured his troops ate a simple breakfast, adding that they would feast upon destroying the Zhao army. Not even his officers believed him. Han Xin then sent an advance force of 10,000 men through the Jingxing Pass into the Central Plain and ordered them to take up position with their backs against the Tao River.

By daylight, according to Sima Qian, the Zhao soldiers were laughing at the fact that the Han troops were knowingly placing themselves in such a vulnerable position.

### Fight or die

At dawn, once the advanced guard had taken up its position, Han Xin and his remaining 18,000 infantry troops – displaying the banners and drums of General-in-Chief Han Xin's office – marched down the east side of the Jingxing Pass onto the Central Plain.

On seeing this, Chen Yu ordered the Zhao army to attack from its encampment to the east. Han Xin's main force fought for some time before conducting a feigned retreat towards the position of the advance guard on the river, abandoning some of the flags and drums. The Han army's advance guard opened its ranks to receive the retreating comrades.

Tactically, Han Xin's decision to order his men to form up with their backs to the river seemed little short of suicide. With the swift-flowing river behind them there was no line of retreat for the Han army, and they could have been slaughtered. But for Han Xin, it was a strategy borne out of necessity. Most of his elite troops had been requisitioned by Liu Bang, and Han Xin knew their only means of survival was to instill a fight-to-the-death mentality among his

relatively weak and untrained troops. With the Zhao army approaching, Han Xin shouted to his troops, “There is no way back for you. You will only die if you don't fight bravely.”

### No way back

In retrospect, it seems an absurd and unlikely outcome, but instilling this mentality in the Han soldiers galvanised them. They were also aided by the fact that the river's position was difficult to flank. The Zhao followed the retreating forces and clashed with the Han by the river.

The Zhao poured more and more troops against the Han, leaving their own camp vulnerable. On seeing this, the light cavalry advance force that Han Xin had dispatched to the mountains the previous night seized the Zhao camp and raised the red banners of the Han army.

Against sizable odds, the Han infantry at the river began to repel the Zhao troops, who started to withdraw. But when they turned back towards their camp and saw the red banners of the Han hanging from the barricades, panic set in. Han Xin used this to order a counterattack with the main Han force. The Zhao army, now in disarray, soon collapsed and its remnants fled. Chen Yu was eventually caught on the Zhong River and cut down.

### Lasting legacy

At the victory feast after the battle, Han Xin's officers, all somewhat astounded by their immense good fortune, asked Han Xin to explain the reasoning behind his deployments. Han Xin replied that as he was leading a much smaller army consisting of largely inexperienced troops, he had to resort to drastic measures in order to force everyone to fight harder. Han Xin's strategy would lead to the saying, ‘You achieve survival by fighting from a position of certain death.’

The Han victory at the Battle of Jingxing significantly bolstered Liu Bang's power base. In 204 BCE, Han Xin won three more battles against Zhao and captured the capital of Handan. By the age of just 25, he was appointed commander-in-chief. He would later confront Chu forces sent to wrest control of the state on two separate occasions and annihilate both hosts.

By 203 BCE, Liu Bang had conferred on Han Xin the titles of ‘King of Qi’ and ‘King of Chu’. However, he soon began to fear Han Xin's growing influence, and in 202 he demoted him. Six years later, Han Xin would be accused of participating in a rebellion, lured into a trap and executed by Empress Lü Zhi.

Undefeated in battle, Han Xin would become known as the ‘God of War’. It was his guile, pragmatism and sheer vision that ensured he and his relatively untrained army prevailed at the Battle of Jingxing. The fact that he is still regarded as the finest martial mind in the annals of Chinese history is testament to his tactical brilliance.





# CRASSUS' DOOMED CAMPAIGN

WORDS BERNARD BACE

Determined to bask in the glory of his own military triumph, Marcus Crassus, the richest man in all of Rome, turned his gaze towards Parthia. His thirst for adoration would result in a catastrophe that would shake the Republic and condemn thousands of men to death



## CARRHAE, PARTHIA, 53 BCE

**T**he words 'Romans' and 'defeated' do not sit well as neighbours in one sentence. However, the might of Rome met its match on more than one occasion, and few of her defeats were more devastating than the one inflicted at Carrhae, when Crassus' legions ran into the guile and determination of the Parthian army.

It should have been a mismatch from the start as 40,000 highly trained battle-hardened fighting men of Rome descended upon what was thought to be a feisty but less battle-proven Parthian army. As it happened, it was indeed a mismatch, but not as expected.

There were still more questions than answers at the end of this bloody battle. How did it all go wrong? Why was Senator Marcus Licinius Crassus so keen to take on the Parthians in the first place? How was this shocking defeat going to shake the very foundations of the Roman Republic? Perhaps a look at Carrhae and why it was important would be helpful at this stage.

Carrhae no longer exists, but the battlefield was thought to be to its east, an area now known as Harran, which nestles on the Turkish side of the border with Iran. It was once known as Mesopotamia and was a much-coveted spot on the trade routes between East and West.

Alexander the Great made sure that he conquered it during his famous empire-inflating campaigns. In 336 BCE he became the 20-year-old king of the whole region, something that any self-respecting Roman senator would wish to emulate. In 53 BCE, nearly 300 years later, Crassus was unable to resist the temptation of repeating the glory of Alexander's triumph.

He was driven in no small part by a fierce rivalry with Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, known today as Pompey the Great. A seeker of glory and wealth – although he had more than an abundance of both already – Crassus wanted to outstrip Pompey, who could not put a foot wrong in the eyes of the Republic and its people. He had quelled a slave uprising, scattered pirates who had previously attacked Roman shipping and her coastlines, and expanded or held Roman territories in numerous areas, including Syria, which was notably difficult.

Anything Pompey could do, Crassus could do better – or so he thought. Crassus was not seeking an altercation with the Parthians, on the contrary, he clearly did not give them much thought. He simply wanted to pass through the land and conquer as much of the area as possible with the prospect of very rich pickings and a hero's welcome back in Rome. Perhaps he even dared to imagine his triumphant parade. The Parthians, of course, had other ideas.

Rumours of the great march on Parthia were soon widespread. This motivated ambassadors from Parthia to approach Crassus and put it to him that if his proposed campaign was with Rome's blessing there would be no chance of any kind of truce, but if this was his personal campaign there could be some room for negotiation. Indeed, because of Pompey's successes in that region, Rome and Parthia had treaties in place, respected by both sides.

Crassus arrogantly dismissed them, as indeed he did King Artavasdes II of Armenia, a recent ally

In outnumbered the Parthians, Crassus' legions were badly defeated by Surena and his army.

of Rome. The king knew the area well and had suggested the terrain was unsuitable for Crassus' redoubtable cavalry and that he should instead make his thrust through Armenia in order to surprise the Parthians.

Crassus, however, was intent on gaining as much of the limelight as possible and had a ready-made mind up that the route would be through Mesopotamia, which would afford him a much greater arena of triumph. It had become nothing less than an obsession.

Of course, Crassus had a lot of what we might now call 'clout' and spent months recruiting crack Roman soldiers and ensuring they were fully equipped. This was going to be his moment of triumph and he was determined to milk every possible bit of glory from the campaign.

Meanwhile, the Parthians were not ignoring the potential threat. The aged King Orodes II was a wily monarch who had sanctioned the murder of his father and then his brother in order to seize the throne, which he had achieved a year before Crassus set out to realise his ambition. Orodes II knew his army was a match for anyone and all the more so because of its charismatic leader, Surenas. He was a ruthless and fearless warrior who was not only a supreme battle leader but also an exponent of psychology and kidology.

The Parthians knew what was coming and began the fight long before the Romans set foot on their soil. Crassus set off with his seven legions, light infantry of around 4,000 men and 4,000 cavalry as soon as spring had turned into summer in 53 BCE. It was a force that would have

sent many armies fleeing in all directions, but not the Parthians.

The initial route was through Mesopotamia via a city on the west bank of the famous Euphrates then called Zeugma but today known as the town of Birecik in Turkey. Along the way they were greeted by Ariamnes, an influential Arab chieftain who wished them well and offered some advice. He was in fact an associate of Pompey, but he did not let that get in the way of helping Crassus. He advised that they should not follow the river as that was what the Parthians would be expecting. He told them of an alternative route that would give them an element of surprise. Crassus listened carefully to his new friend and decided that this was excellent advice. Ariamnes wished him all success and departed, riding straight to his Parthian friends to tell them that Crassus had taken the bait.

Already weary under the sun and heat of the arid terrain, the Romans trudged their new route. When news came through that the Parthians had invaded Armenia there was dismay, because it meant that even if it was seriously needed, there was no chance that Artavasdes would be able to send any troops in support of Crassus and his men.

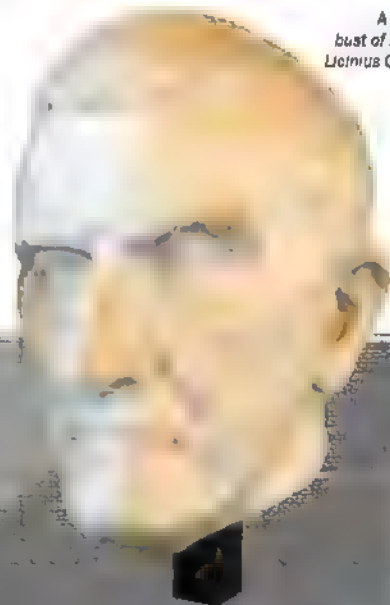
On they went across this open plain until their lead scouts finally saw in the distance a large contingent of what they realised were Parthians. They immediately reported back to Crassus, who was more relieved than daunted, especially since his army appeared to outnumber the Parthians by at least four to one.

Had Crassus been able to see them himself he might have been less confident. What appeared to be a large contingent was actually an enormous one. The scouts had been fooled by the strategy of Surenas, who had ordered his men to cover themselves and their weapons with animal hides. From a distance, this would have made them seem a host of smaller numbers and perhaps little more than a guarded caravan, especially since there was a row of camels which appeared to be packing animals but were in fact carrying weaponry supplies.

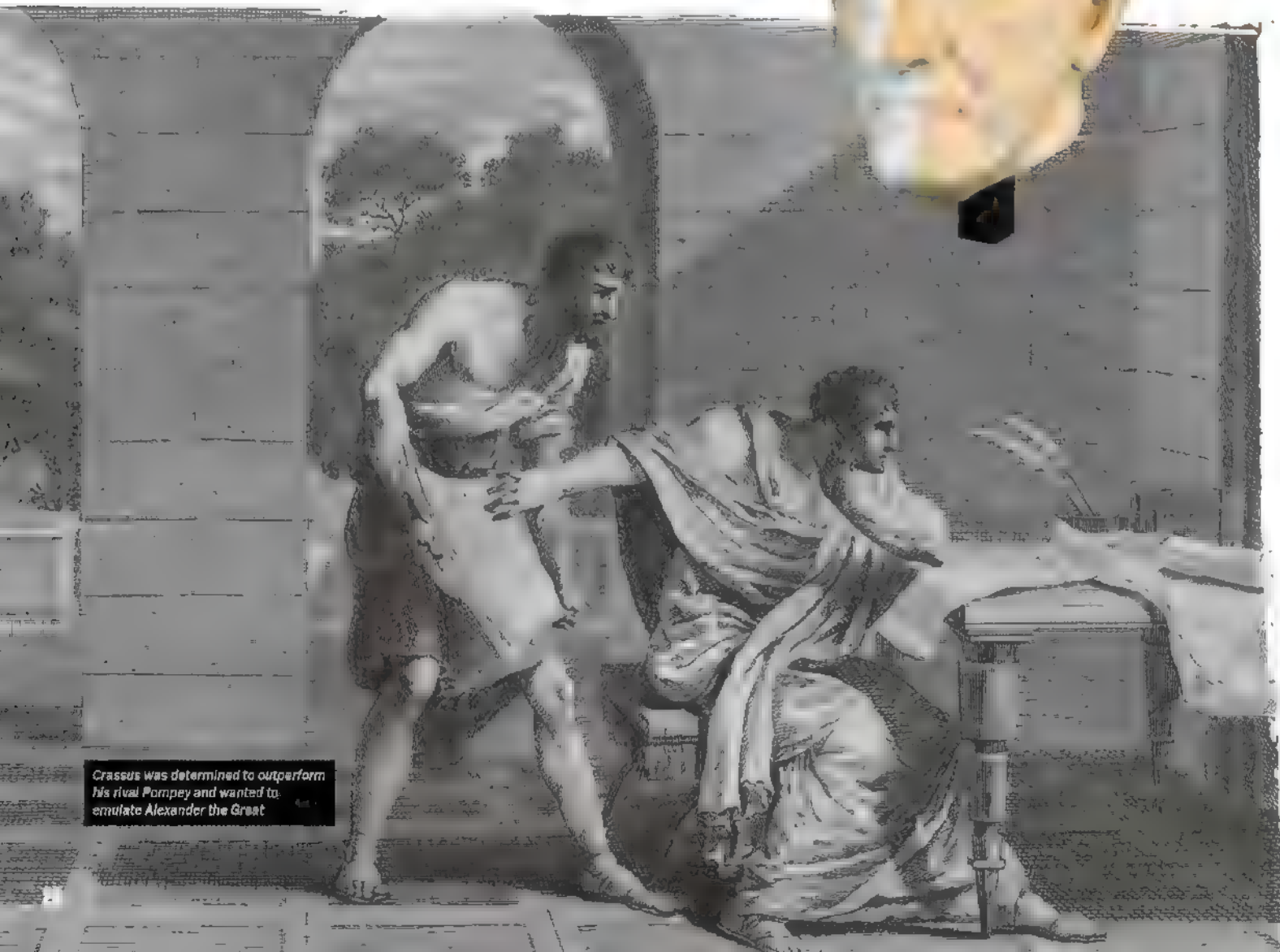
The Parthians were also very well armoured, with their horses covered in thick leather and metal and their riders also clad in chain mail and armed with long spears. This meant that they could attack from distance and take out two or even three men in one charge, using their lances as skewers.

Sensing victory, the Romans were enticed further into the desert. Surenas waited for the perfect moment and then unleashed a merciless attack. One of the techniques used by the

A marble bust of Marcus Licinius Crassus



Crassus was determined to outperform his rival Pompey and wanted to emulate Alexander the Great





Parthians was to stage a feigned retreat on horseback. Convinced they had the Parthians on the run, excited Roman soldiers raced after them, breaking their lines in their haste. The Parthian cavalry then turned in their saddles to ride backwards and with deadly accuracy picked off the disorganised enemy in a hail of arrows. This worked particularly well when Crassus sent his son Publius in pursuit of some retreating Parthians. He was accompanied by around 2,000 men, including 1,300 cavalry and 500 archers. It is thought that none returned.

The battle lasted for four days and the reports went from bad to worse. Crassus was dismayed to learn that his son Publius had been captured. He was completely crushed when the head of Publius was openly displayed to the Roman lines as a taunt and warning.

Crassus and his army fought on but it was a lost cause. His men were no match for the Parthians, and man after man, horse after horse fell and added their blood to the pools soaking into the sand. Finally, Crassus himself fell, and his severed head was taken as a trophy and put on show at the banquet of celebration later held in Armenia. Honours were bestowed upon Pomaxathres, the soldier who had killed and beheaded Crassus.

More than 40,000 had followed Crassus but only a handful remained to tell the tale. It was a foolish endeavour, an ego trip into disaster. Worst of all, it was an embarrassment to Rome.

In the wake of his stunning victory the legend of Surenas flourished. Hailed as a hero, he was publicly honoured by King Orodes II, who praised his courage. The same paranoid king would order Surenas' execution that same year, so fearful was he of his popularity.



The Parthians were well prepared for the Roman invasion



Tetradrachms with busts of Artavases II of Armenia (left) and Orodes II, King of the Parthian Empire



Crassus was killed during the battle by a Parthian soldier called Pomaxathres



A year before the Battle of Carrhae, Crassus had looted the Temple of Jerusalem





# THE BETRAYAL OF ROME

WORDS EDWARD ALBERT



## LOWER SAXONY, GERMANIA, 9 CE

### How a Roman citizen lured three of the empire's legions into a deadly trap

It was over. As Publius Quinctilius Varus, commander of the XVI, XVII and XIX legions, looked at the carnage surrounding him, he knew all hope was lost. For three days they had tried to fight their way to safety, through appalling conditions of mud and rain, while the Germans harassed and assaulted his retreating legions. The commander of the cavalry, Numonius Vala, had abandoned them with the surviving horsemen, trying to ride to safety. Now the native barbarians were amassing for the final assault on the remnants still under Varus' command.

Publius Quinctilius Varus knew what the Germans did with men they captured in battle. But it was the disgrace that was worse. His name forever tainted. As the screams and battle cries drew closer, the general fixed his sword point up in the muddy earth and fell upon it.

When the battle was over, the Germans found Varus' body, impaled by his own sword. The man who had masterminded the plan that had seen the almost total destruction of three Roman legions. Arminius, commanded that Varus's head be cut off and sent as a gift to the leader of the only important German tribal federation not to have taken part in the battle. The head was a message of what Arminius had achieved and a promise of

what they could do as allies. Its refusal marked the limits of Arminius's extraordinary victory among his German rivals. But for the Romans, it would outline the limits of an empire that they had previously believed would expand forever.

It was not supposed to be like this. Under Augustus, the Roman state had enjoyed a period of unprecedented internal peace after a century of civil wars while also expanding its frontiers in all directions. Between 12 and 9 BCE, Augustus' adopted son, Drusus, had pushed into Germania, conquering swathes of territory and subjecting German tribes to Roman rule. Roman expansion continued under Tiberius (the brother of Drusus, who had died in 9 CE), but before he could complete the conquest, Tiberius was forced to march south to deal with a major revolt in the Balkans. The revolt lasted for four years, and it would require the efforts of all the eight legions Tiberius took with him to finally extinguish it.

In his absence, Augustus appointed Publius Quinctilius Varus, an experienced, not to say brutal, administrator as governor of the new imperial province of Germania. To understand the inner workings of the German tribes across the River Rhine, Varus turned to a man who knew them better than any other: a young Roman



Arminius became a hero of 19th-century German nationalism. He was given the more Germanic name of Hermann.

citizen of the rank of equites (just below the senatorial class) named Arminius. It was to prove a fatal mistake.

For Arminius was German and, under his Roman veneer, he had resolved to stop the Romans conquering Germania. Arminius was his Latin name. His original German name was not recorded for it was not needed when the young Arminius came to Rome as a hostage to guarantee the good behaviour of his kinsmen. In Rome, Arminius learned Latin and served in the Roman army with sufficient distinction to be made a citizen and to be raised to the rank of equites. His Roman military service gave Arminius a thorough understanding of Roman tactics and formations, a knowledge he would put to devastating use when he returned to his native Germania.

His subsequent deeds indicate that Arminius must have been a highly effective commander. He was given charge of a unit of auxiliaries and, when his unit was transferred to Germania, he quickly became one of Varus' most trusted advisers.

While ingratiating himself with Varus, Arminius simultaneously made contact with the Germanic tribes across the Rhine. He himself was a member of the Cherusci tribe who lived in the region of present-day Hanover and, as such, Varus often employed him as a messenger to the hostile tribes. This gave Arminius the perfect opportunity to form and cement an alliance of the Germanic tribes while gathering intelligence of Roman intentions.

When Tiberius stripped eight legions from the German frontier to help put down the Great Illyrian Revolt in the Balkans, Arminius saw that he had the perfect opportunity to strike at the Romans. As governor of Syria, Varus had earned a reputation for brutality, crucifying 2,000 Jewish rebels

## "WHEN TIBERIUS STRIPPED EIGHT LEGIONS FROM THE GERMAN FRONTIER TO HELP PUT DOWN THE GREAT ILLYRIAN REVOLT IN THE BALKANS, ARMINIUS SAW THAT HE HAD THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY TO STRIKE AT THE ROMANS"

Varus no doubt pursued the same harsh path in Germania, making it easier for Arminius to unite the usually warring and suspicious tribes under his secret leadership.

With the tribes onside, the final strand of Arminius' plan was to lure the Romans into a battle in a place of his own choosing. Having fought alongside the Romans many times, Arminius was well aware that in open ground the disciplined legions would cut down the waves of German warriors like a military threshing machine. To have any chance of victory, he had to ensure the Romans were forced to fight in the sort of terrain that made it all but impossible for them to adopt their battlefield formations.

So when Arminius came to Varus with reports that the Bructeri tribe in northwest Germania had revolted, he had in mind exactly where he would

bring the Romans to battle. Such was Varus' faith in his Latinised auxiliary commander that he ignored the warning of another German chief, Segestes, that he was being led into a trap. Varus dismissed the warning as sour grapes on the part of Segestes and set off into Germania to put down the Bructeri, taking the route that Arminius suggested.

While an experienced governor, Varus had less experience of military command. To ensure the success of his mission, he took a three legions under his command: the XVI, XV and XIX, some 20,000 legionaries, auxiliaries and associated camp followers.

It was early September but the weather was atrocious; heavy rain soaked the marching army, turning the earth beneath their feet into a quagmire. At the end of the first day's march, Arminius requested permission from Varus to summon German allies to join the expedition. Arminius had carefully seeded the belief in Varus that many of the German tribes were willing to fight alongside the Romans. Varus' belief in Arminius' loyalty unshaken, gave him permission and the German rode away with his men. Although he did not know it yet, Varus had sealed his fate and the fate of the men he was leading deep into the dense German forest.

As was their practice, the Roman forces threw up a camp in which to pass the night. Unknown to them, Arminius and his men were busy preparing the trap that they would march into on the morrow.

The path the Romans took the next day was narrow, threading through thick forest with a hill rising on one flank and a bog on the other. The legions had no choice but to spread out along the trail so that the column straggled through the

A reproduction of the defensive wall that Arminius had built to protect his men and to stop the Romans escaping up the hill





forest. The line of Romans extended for at least eight or nine miles through the trees. Unknown to Varus, Arminius had built fortifications along the hillside beside which the Romans were marching. At his signal, the Germans launched their assault.

With the legions spread out, the ground wet and muddy and Arminius probing at different points along the column throughout the day, Varus was unable to regroup his forces into any sort of fighting formation. Local struggles continued throughout the day. Whenever a group of legionaries attempted to launch a counterattack, the Germans retreated behind their fortifications.

Only nighttime brought an end to the carnage. The surviving legionaries erected a night camp behind fortifications while the Germans retired and waited for first light. Knowing their only salvation lay in making it back to Roman territory, Varus ordered a break out the next morning. The surviving legionaries managed to punch through the German blockade but at the cost of further casualties. With the Germans continuing to harry them, the Romans marched on, even attempting a night march in their efforts to escape the trap that Arminius had set. But their losses were mounting and, on the final day, they entered the last killing zone that Arminius had prepared for them.

In the shadow of Kalkriese Hill, with an impassable bog preventing escape to the flank, the Romans found a trench cutting across their line of march and an earthwork flanking them from which the Germans continued to hurl missiles and spears. The Romans made a desperate attempt to storm the earthwork but were pushed back. Numonius Varrus, the cavalry commander, attempted to escape with his surviving cavalrymen, to no avail; he was pursued and killed.



Some of the Roman coins that enabled archaeologists to chart the course of the ancient battle

This was when Publius Quinctilius Varus realised that all hope was gone. Rather than risk being taken captive, he committed suicide. Many other officers did likewise. Abandoned by their commanders, the surviving legionaries fought on, but without direction they were surrounded and picked off. Of the 20,000 men that Varus took into the forest, only a handful escaped. The rest were killed, either during the battle or sacrificed to the tribal gods afterwards.

When news of the disaster reached Augustus in Rome, he was so upset that he hit his head against

a wall, shouting, "Quintili Vare, legiones redde!" (Quintilius Varus, give me back my legions!).

It was a momentous victory. The empire that had no bounds had hit its limit: the Rhine would form its frontier for the rest of its existence. As for the man behind this stunning victory, Arminius would be assassinated ten years later by political rivals.

The exact location of the battle remained disputed for centuries until 1987 when Major Tony Clunn, stationed in Osnabrück with the Royal Tank Regiment, decided to go searching with his metal detector. An amateur archaeologist, and through his military training well versed in spotting likely lines of march, Clunn set out to investigate the area under Kalkriese Hill. His metal detector soon started pinging. Digging beneath the soil, Major Clunn found a Roman denarius bearing the portrait of Augustus. He quickly found more coins, all dating from the reign of Augustus. Clunn marked the exact locations of his discoveries. There was only one likely reason for so many Augustan-era Roman coins to be scattered around on the slopes of Kalkriese Hill. Soon, professional archaeologists followed, undertaking systematic investigations that revealed the debris of battle along a 15-mile corridor running east to west.

Archaeological finds included traces of the wall that Arminius had built to contain and channel the Roman legions. Lots of debris was found in front of the wall – almost none behind it. The Romans had attempted to break through but been driven back, leaving traces of their doomed expedition in the ground for two millennia until the attention of an amateur archaeologist brought them to the surface and allowed them to trace the course of one of the most important battles in history through the landscape in which it occurred.



armor found during the excavations around Kalkriese Hill



A rather fanciful portrait of Arminius: In reality, the real man escapes into the unknown, even his original name having been lost

# MEDIEVAL MADNESS

## 28 HATTIN

Ignoring the most basic military doctrines, Guy of Lusignan marched out to meet Saladin's forces in the desert of Galilee, straight into a trap.

## 36 AGINCOURT

Starving, exhausted and severely outnumbered, King Henry V's army was staring defeat in the face. Its only hopes resting on a brave contingent of longbowmen. By the end of the day they would have scored an epic victory.





# HATTIN

The Battle of Hattin heralded the end of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem at the hands of Sultan Saladin

BY DAVID PILLAY AND RAZAN





Raging fires lit by Saladin's army severely hindered the Crusaders in battle

## HATTIN, PALESTINE, 4 JULY 1187

**S**ultan Salahuddin Yusuf al-Ayyubi, also known as 'Saladin' in the West, is perhaps most famous for his rivalry with King Richard the Lionheart of England and the events of the Third Crusade. However, perhaps the highlight of his military career against the Crusader States was his decisive and bloody ending of the Frankish occupation of Palestine at the Horns of Hattin on 4 July 1187. After Hattin, Saladin effectively destroyed the Crusaders' ability to wage offensive war by annihilating their field army, which then allowed him to recapture many castles and cities in Palestine at his leisure, including the grandest of all prizes – Jerusalem.

### A vow of vengeance

Before embarking on the Islamic version of the Reconquista, Saladin first established his dominion over the lands of other Muslim sultans and dynasties by uniting Egypt and the majority of the Levant (bar, of course, Palestine) in 1182, thereby enabling him to strategically encircle the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, a four-year truce was signed between the sultan and the Crusaders in 1185, but it did not take long for this to be breached by the Crusaders.

Reynald de Châtillon, a knight who held significant lands in Transjordan east of the Jordan River, attacked a Muslim caravan from Egypt bound for Syria in 1186. Reynald captured the caravan, its escort and its treasures and had his Muslim prisoners tortured and attempted to humiliate them by insulting the Prophet Muhammad. When Saladin demanded from King Guy de Lusignan that the prisoners be released and all property restored to its rightful owners, Reynald refused his plea and said, "I made no peace with Saladin."

Enraged, Saladin swore vengeance and vowed that if Reynald were ever captured he would be executed for his transgressions. Not a man to take his vows lightly, Saladin began mustering the largest army he had ever assembled, summoning men from Egypt, Syria and Iraq, and re-started the jihad, or holy war, against the Crusaders.

The fighting men in the army numbered approximately 30,000 and, in addition to its accompanying support apparatus, was so large that Saladin told the Caliph in Baghdad that the dust kicked up by its horses and pack animals "darkened the eye of the sun". He also took advantage of schisms in Guy's court and made a treaty with the former regent of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, Raymond of Tripoli, who despised Guy and did not accept his legitimacy as king. Raymond allowed Saladin to move a small force into his territory around Lake Tiberias unmolested in April 1187, but this proved to be a calamitous mistake that would ultimately cost him, and the Crusaders, dearly.

In order to try to provoke the Crusaders and draw their forces out into a pitched battle, Saladin ordered his men to begin raiding and ravaging lands held by various Crusader lords, particularly Reynald, who held the castle town of Kerak. Saladin's chevauchée tactics took months to succeed, but in the end he forced the Crusaders' hand. At around the time of Raymond's treaty



with Saladin, Guy had sent an embassy of notable lords and knights numbering approximately 500 men to try to reconcile with Raymond. These men were set upon by one of Saladin's raiding parties near Nazareth.

This led to the destruction and capture of the Crusader embassy and the death of Roger des Moulins, the grand master of the Knights Hospitaller. When this news reached him, Raymond was horrified and believed that the other Crusaders would believe him to be a traitor to Christendom, so he quickly reconciled with Guy, accepted his legitimacy and promised to help him wage war against Saladin. However, Raymond's move to unite with his fellow Crusaders was too little, too late.

### Setting the snare

Assembling his armies, King Guy mustered 1,200 knights and 18,000 infantry at the highly defensible town of Sephoria. Set atop a hill overlooking the eastbound road to Tiberias, Sephoria was five miles north of where many of Saladin's forces were positioned and was bracketed by rugged heights to the northeast and southeast. As he was outnumbered three to two, Guy could have opted to wait Saladin out and either draw him to a stalemate or force him to a challenge on unfavourable ground in front of the

well-defended Sephoria. For a while, this seemed to be his plan.

Meanwhile, in late June, Saladin led a reconnaissance in force from his main camp on the southern tip of Lake Tiberias and positioned himself on the plateau of Kafr Sabt, near modern-day Ilanya. This move allowed him to threaten Raymond's holdings at Tiberias, where his wife, Countess Eschiva, was holding court in his absence. It also positioned the sultan on the main road connecting Tiberias with Sephoria, cutting off Frankish lines of communication between these two cities. To further show that he was serious in his desire to do battle, Saladin took his much smaller force, now 20 miles from his main camp, and stood in full view of the Franks in front of Sephoria, hoping to draw them out. Incredibly, Guy opted to continue to stare at Saladin's army from behind the safety of Sephoria's walls and thus missed the best chance of the entire campaign to clinch a victory for the Crusaders.

Saladin then tried to find other means to tempt the Franks to fight. He moved the rest of his army to Kafr Sabt and then split his force into two, personally leading his own guardsmen and some sappers to attack and mine the walls of Tiberias on 2 July. Within the course of a day a section of the city's walls were breached; the city plundered and the only structure left with defenders was the

main citadel itself, surrounded by a deep moat. As Saladin was preparing to storm the citadel on 3 July his scouts reported that the Crusaders had finally left Sephoria and were on the march. Saladin gathered the majority of his men and quickly hurried to join the bulk of his force at Kafr Sabt. Guy had finally taken the bait.

### The Horns of Hattin

Guy's decision to march seems to have been made under great pressure. With his holdings and wife threatened with capture, Raymond urged the king to march to the rescue of Countess Eschiva, saying that "If Tiberias falls, all our lands are taken." The king would have little reason to make such a move based on the pleas of a man who was an adversary not long ago, but other notable characters such as Reynald de Châtillon, Guy's erstwhile supporter, added weight to Raymond's words. Also, as Guy had been king for less than a year, he likely felt the need to prove his legitimacy before the nobles who still thought him weak and to show God favoured him by defeating the Muslims.

Guy divided his army into three, leading the centre himself, with the vanguard and rearguard commanded by Raymond of Tripoli and Balian of Ibelin respectively. Moving out in column in the scorching summer heat, the Crusaders headed six miles east toward Tiberias and reached the



A 20th-century interpretation of Saladin accepting Guy's surrender following the destruction of the Crusader army at Hattin



## OPPOSING FORCES

### SALJUKS

#### LEADER

Salahuddin al-Ayyubi

#### FORCES

Infantry 16,800

Cavalry 12,000

Archers 1,200

### CRUSADERS

#### LEADER

Guy de Lusignan

#### FORCES

Infantry 18,000

Cavalry 1,200

Archers 1,000



village of Turan and its spring by the afternoon Turan was easily defendable, enclosed by Mount Turan to the north and boasting a water supply.

Instead of using this position – with the mountain to his left flank, rugged terrain on his right and a clear line of retreat to Sephoria behind him – to launch harrying attacks to tempt Saladin to meet his force, Guy decided to march on Tiberias, located a further nine miles away with only half a day of marching left in hot weather. Guy was too keen to face Saladin in battle, and this would be his undoing. As Saladin observed, "Satan incited Guy to do what ran counter to his purpose."

With his army in tow, Guy made his way even further east, attempting to reach the village of Hattin and its water supply on his way to Tiberias. Hattin lay at the southern foot of two extinct volcanoes adjoined by a plateau that gives this geographical feature its name of 'The Horns of Hattin'. Likely viewing Guy's manoeuvre with disbelief, and having superior numbers, Saladin decided to seize the opportunity to envelope the Crusader force as it passed the northern ridge of Kafr Sabt.

He sent one wing of his army, led by his trusted Turkmen general Gokburi, to cut off Guy's water supply and line of retreat by taking

**"WITHIN THE COURSE OF A DAY, A SECTION OF THE CITY'S WALLS WERE BREACHED, THE CITY PLUNDERED AND THE ONLY STRUCTURE LEFT WITH DEFENDERS WAS THE MAIN CITADEL ITSELF, SURROUNDED BY A DEEP MOAT"**

up a blocking position on the east-west road connecting Tiberias and Sephoria. He then sent the other wing under his nephew Taqiuddin to deny Guy any escape route north by positioning another blocking force on the valley between Mount Nimrin and the Horns of Hattin. Saladin himself had more than enough men to hold the southern ridge blocking the road to Tiberias, and by the end of the day the Frankish force had been shepherded in the blistering heat to the rocky slopes of Hattin, forcing them to spend the night there wondering what calamity would befall them when dawn broke.

Not leaving anything to chance, and fearing the capability of the Frankish knights and their heavy cavalry charges to turn a battle, Saladin spent the entire night preparing his archers to harry these armoured warriors. The Sultan also made his rounds around the camps, inspecting his men and listening to them offer prayers in their tents, asking Allah for victory.

Demonstrative of his piety, Saladin came across a tent whose inhabitants were fast asleep rather than praying with the rest of the men and was said to have remarked sadly, "if we suffer a defeat tomorrow, it will be because of the likes of these men."

# BATTLE OF HATTIN

## 4 JULY 1187

### 01 Guy marches to Tiberias

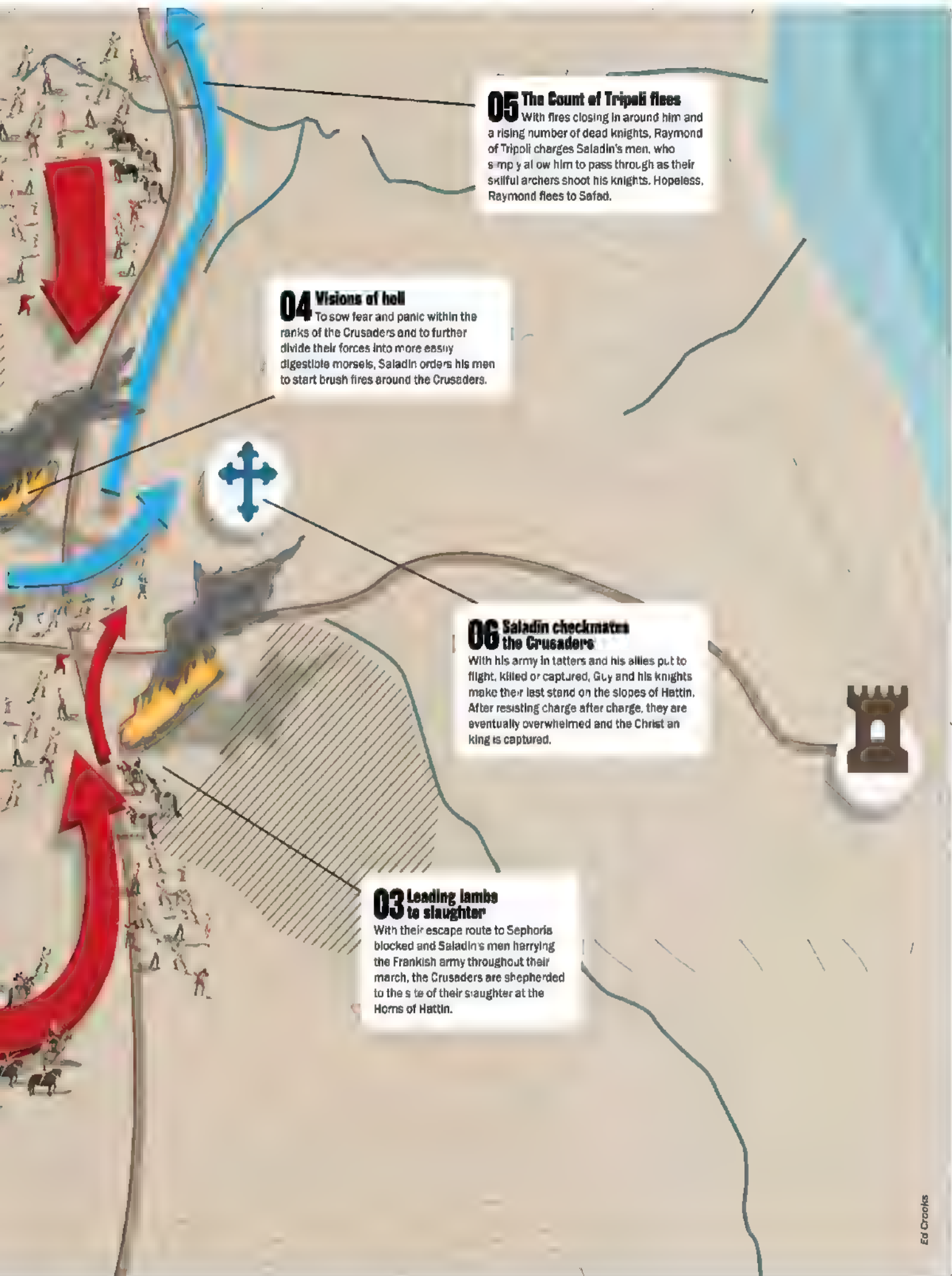
Despite having a good water supply at Turan and topographical features such as rugged hills and mountains to protect his flank and rear, Guy continues marching towards Tiberias.

### 02 Closing the trap

Seeing an opportunity, Saladin divides his army into three and sends one force to take Turan's water and another to block escape routes to the north. Guy is now forced to win a pitched battle or be destroyed.







# SARACEN WARRIOR

Saladin's disciplined and faithful soldier



## LIGHT ARMOUR

To stay cool and mobile, Muslim warriors wore lamellar or chainmail over loose short robes and baggy trousers called sirwals.

## SMALL ROUND SHIELD

Famous for their mubarizan duellists, Muslim infantrymen carried these small shields to make them more mobile in hand-to-hand combat.

## DAMASCUS VIBR BLADES

Blades forged from Damascus steel are renowned for their resilience, flexibility and razor-sharp edge, far outshining traditional European long swords.

"IT IS NOT THE WONT OF KINGS TO KILL KINGS, BUT THIS MAN TRANSGRESSED HIS LIMITS, SO HE HAS SUFFERED WHAT HE HAS SUFFERED"



On the morning of 4 July, Guy tried to force his way through to Tiberias, but Saladin's skirmishers and archers wasted no time in whittling his knights down. Although the knights themselves were armoured, their horses rarely were, and so archers could negate their effectiveness on the battlefield by simply shooting their mounts out from under them. A fully armoured knight fighting in hot weather would fatigue quickly, and the battlefield was quickly littered with hundreds of these men pinned by their fallen horses or swinging their swords dismounted, summoning up every last ounce of effort, only to be cut down by Saladin's well-fed and watered light cavalry.

Saladin's men then lit a brush fire to blind the Crusaders, already suffering from the heat and thirst. This made them unable to move and vulnerable to repeated attacks that cut down more and more men each time. The light cavalry employed by Muslim armies had long mastered the art of thundering down a slope into an enemy's flank, engaging them in close quarters only to suddenly disengage and repeat the sapping cycle anew.

This led a demoralised and frustrated Raymond to break and charge Taquuddin's line. Taquuddin's men were so disciplined that they opened a gap in their formation and shot Raymond's knights as they rode through. Once the count had reached the other side, his forces were so badly mauled that he carried on riding past Mount Nimrin and did not stop until he reached Safad, about 18 miles north.

With his commanders deserting him and his men dying all around him, Guy was left with a handful of his knights attempting to defend his red tent, positioned on the slopes of Hattin.

It is here that Guy's knights would make their last stand, playing a deadly game of tug-of-war with Saladin's cavalry. Each time the Muslim horsemen seemed on the cusp of winning the day, Guy's knights would charge them and push them all the way back down the hill. Saladin was said to have grasped his beard in distress as he watched his men charge Guy's tent three times and fail. As he told his son, al-Afdal, "We shall not defeat them until that tent falls," the king's tent was finally taken, surrounded by the corpses of its stubborn defenders.

### The road to Jerusalem

After the battle had ended and what remained of the Crusaders were captured or killed, the major catch of the day, Guy and Reynald, were brought before Saladin in his tent. Being a man of uncommon chivalry and honour, a character trait attested by both Christian and Muslim sources, Saladin offered aniced goblet of rose-scented water to the parched and haggard Christian king, who drank to refresh himself before handing the remainder to Reynald.

Upon seeing his sworn enemy also drinking, Saladin indicated towards Reynald and asked his interpreter to tell Guy: "You are the one giving him a drink. I have not given him any drink." Saladin was a firm believer in Islamic customs and traditions of hospitality, which dictated that those with whom food and drink is shared must be granted peace and safety.

However, as he did not offer Reynald any sustenance, he was not obliged to hold to that custom, even if the captured king had decided to give one of his retainers a drink. Even more so, Saladin had twice sworn to kill Reynald, first

when he and his pirates raided Muslim villages on the Red Sea and threatened Mecca and Medina, and second when Reynald captured the caravan in the prelude to Hattin. Honour-bound to fulfil his pledge, Saladin drew his sword and struck Reynald down by cutting down between his neck and shoulder so hard that his arm was completely severed.

After Reynald crumpled to the ground, blood pouring from his wound, Saladin proceeded to cut Reynald's head off and ensured that one of the Muslims' greatest foes would never trouble them again. Next, Saladin dragged Reynald's corpse before Guy, who became ashen-faced with fear. Saladin reassured him by saying, "It is not the wont of kings to kill kings, but this man transgressed his limits, so he has suffered what he has suffered."

The prisoners were marched off to Damascus, Saladin's capital, and the True Cross was hung upside down and paraded by the victorious Muslims as a sure sign that the Crusaders were finally defeated.

Deprived of their offensive capabilities, the Franks were forced to relinquish Jerusalem on 2 October 1187. Refusing to repay the bloodbath that the Crusaders had inflicted upon the original inhabitants of Jerusalem 88 years earlier, Saladin allowed the vast majority of them to leave in peace and then resettled those Jewish and Muslim families who had been forced to leave their ancestral homes almost a century earlier.

Through his victory at Hattin, Saladin had paved the road for the restoration of Jerusalem into Muslim hands with the blood of the entire Crusader field army.

**"HONOUR-BOUND TO FULFIL HIS PLEDGE, SALADIN DREW HIS SWORD AND STRUCK REYNALD DOWN BY CUTTING DOWN BETWEEN HIS NECK AND SHOULDER SO HARD THAT HIS ARM WAS COMPLETELY SEVERED"**



In the Morn of Hattin with Lake Tiberias in the background, it was here that Guy de Lusignan's reign ended

Images: Alamy, C.G. Textures

# AGINCOURT



PAS-DE-CALAIS, FRANCE, 25 OCTOBER 1415

After a long truce, Henry V's men took up their longbows and set sail for France.  
The Hundred Years' War was about to reignite

WORDS JACK GRIFFITHS

"AS WELL AS HIS BURNING DESIRE FOR  
CONQUEST, THE WARRIOR KING HAD THE IDEAL  
CONDITIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL INVASION"





**B**y the summer of 1416, France had regained the majority of its land from Edward III's conquests. Aquitaine and Calais were still held by the English, but the cross-Channel invaders had been almost completely driven out of Normandy and Flanders. Back in England, King Henry V had by now ruled for two years. In that time he had become intent on reclaiming vast swathes of France for himself.

Taking his claim from his great-grandfather Edward, Henry initially offered the French 1.6 million Crowns to recognise English rule and ordered payment for the body of French King

John II, who was captured at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356. Negotiations of these harsh terms predictably fell through, so Henry turned to military means to secure his aims.

As well as his burning desire for conquest, the warrior king had the ideal conditions for a successful invasion. Despite a recent plot to overthrow his rule, he enjoyed noble support. Broadly there was domestic peace and, perhaps most importantly, unrest on the continent.

Charles VI, the King of France, was prone to bouts of insanity, and in 1407 his troubled reign had led to the formation of rival factions in the Valois royal family. Louis, the Duke of Orléans and

brother of the king, had been murdered in Paris by the Burgundians, and civil war was brewing. France, after vanquishing the English in 1389, had descended into chaos. Henry was ready to strike.

### The invasion begins

Setting off from Southampton, Henry was convinced that he could unite the thrones of England and France – he fervently believed that English ownership of the French crown was a birthright and God's will. He landed in Normandy on 14 August with 8,000 archers and 2,000 men-at-arms, who were contracted for 12 months.

Even though the rules of chivalry stated that no battlefield should favour either side, the location of Agincourt clearly gave the English a key advantage





service. On arrival, Henry stepped ashore first and fell to his knees, praying to God to give him strength against his enemies.

The English army's plan began with a siege of the nearby town of Harfleur, which had been an important centre of operations for raids on the English coast. But any hopes of a swift victory soon evaporated. The siege took much longer than expected, and the French commune put up fierce resistance for more than a month. When Harfleur finally surrendered on 22 September, campaigning season was almost over. The plans to take Paris and Bordeaux were put on hold as the English sought to take refuge in Calais for the winter. Leaving their artillery, 1,200 men and most of their baggage train behind as a garrison, they marched 100 miles north towards Calais. Before setting off, Henry contacted the governor of Calais, Sir William Bardolph, asking him to safeguard his chosen crossing point of the River Somme, the same point that Edward II had traversed in 1346.

The French had been tracking the English since the fall of Harfleur, and Charles had summoned knights from every part of his kingdom to engage Henry's forces. Letters were sent to every noble in the realm as the king amassed a huge army to fight off the invaders. All weapons and cannons were removed from town defence duties and put into the field of battle. Although he was instrumental in assembling the soldiers, the king would not take to the battlefield, and in his absence, Marshal Boucicaut and Constable d'Albret would lead the French forces.

The main French army was situated in nearby Rouen, but it could only watch as Henry marched his vast host towards Calais. His army was so large that no town or village dared to oppose him, and

he had no need to pillage as almost every town welcomed his men and even offered food to the king for his soldiers and horses.

D'Albret and his men were intent on engaging the English near to their own strongholds at Abbeville and Amiens. The scene of Edward I's emphatic victory at Crecy was nearby, so the French were keen to get revenge on the same piece of land 69 years after the defeat. However, this idea didn't go to plan, and instead the French cut off the English at the Somme.

When Henry made it to the river estuary there was no sign of Bardolph, and to his surprise the French had barricaded the main crossing. Henry had to divert to another bridge stretching both his resources and the resolve of his men. After finally crossing the river, they were met by the French 30 miles from Calais. Two days' march from safety and not far from the heavily fortified French town of Hesdin, appeals for a safe passage to Calais were refused. As the huge French army spilled over the horizon, there was now no way to avoid a pitched battle, and the chosen location was a forest between the villages of Tramecourt and Agincourt.

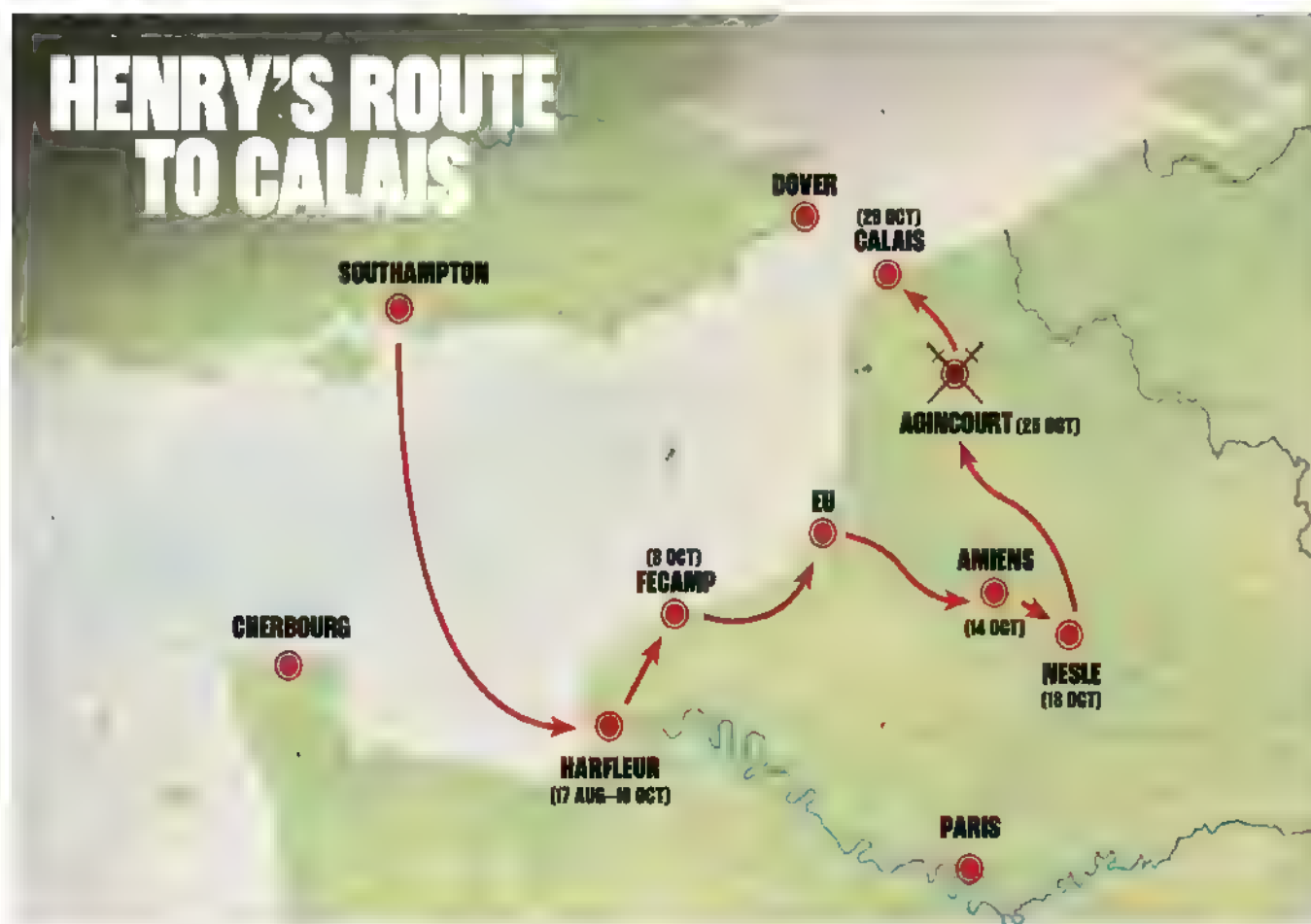
### Amassing on the ridge

The exhausted and disease-ridden English army had marched for 17 days and was in no condition

## OPPOSING FORCES

ENGLISH LEADER Henry V POWERS	FRENCH LEADER Charles I of Albret POWERS
Approximately 500-1,000 men-at-arms and 7,000 archers <b>GAME CHANGERS</b> The power and fire rate of the English longbow had been upgraded since the days of Crecy and was wielded by skilled English and Welsh archers	Estimates range from 12-30,000 men-at-arms and knights, accompanied by crossbowmen and artillery <b>GAME CHANGERS</b> Overwhelming numbers of men-at-arms and knights could smash the English lines while being protected from arrows by tough plate armour

**"CHARLES HAD SUMMONED KNIGHTS FROM EVERY PART OF HIS KINGDOM TO ENGAGE HENRY'S FORCES. LETTERS WERE SENT TO EVERY NOBLE IN THE REALM AS THE KING AMASSED A HUGE ARMY TO FIGHT OFF THE INVADERS"**



to fight. After having lived off nuts, raw vegetables and contaminated drinking water for days, the morale in the English camp on the eve of the battle was low. In contrast, the French camp was vibrant. New soldiers were arriving by the hour and they stayed up gambling and drinking, certain of victory the next day. So confident were some of the soldiers that they had even fashioned a cart especially for transporting Henry's dead body through the streets of Paris upon victory.

A cold and wet morning broke the next day. Winter was on its way and the freshly ploughed ground below the soldiers' feet resembled a quagmire after heavy overnight rain. Henry's longbowmen took up their positions just before dawn on slight ridges overlooking both sides of the battlefield as well as interspersing themselves in the core of the infantry.

Although this was an English army, many of the longbowmen were Welsh. The longbow was first used in great numbers in Wales and some of the finest archers in the entire army came from there. The archers were joined by 500 men-at-arms who stood nervously in rank and file. Many of them were ordinary men, not seasoned veterans of battle, and they watched on as the French amassed opposite them with about six times as many soldiers in their ranks.

King Henry, in crown and plumed bascinet, constantly encouraged his men and would fight shoulder to shoulder with them as he took charge of the centre, with Sir Thomas Erpingham manning the right and Lord Camoys leading the left. Thick forest enclosed both armies into a confined space of about 900 metres wide, but the French were sure that there was still room for their cavalry to flank and ultimately encircle the English, striking the deadly archers from all directions. Their army was divided into three lines: the vanguard, the main body and the rearguard. One was mounted and two were on foot, with d'Albret and Boucicault leading the vanguard with the dukes of Bourbon and Orléans.

The French knew the threat the longbowmen posed and had upgraded their armour since the days of Crécy. They now wore thick steel plates with visor helmets. Each knight had a coat of arms proudly emblazoned on his shield, and the French battle standard, the Oriflamme, flew on flags above them. In response, the English soldiers carried a bow that was much more powerful than the one employed during the conquests of Edward III. Two-handed swords were wielded by the higher classes of infantry on both sides, but the majority carried one-handed swords or lances and even blunt weapons like maces, hammers and clubs.

### Henry makes his move

Both sides spat insults at each other as commanders became reluctant to make the first move. The French were unwilling to advance, as

**"THE LINES WERE SUCH A MESS THAT FALLEN TROOPS WERE CRUSHED DOWN INTO THE MUD, UNABLE TO RISE UP AGAIN DUE TO EXHAUSTION"**

# BATTLE OF AGINCOURT

## 25 OCTOBER 1415

### 01 The armies assemble

The two forces face each other across a narrow forest clearing. The huge French army is organised into three divisions with both knights and men-at-arms. The English army has much fewer men and its hopes hinge on the effectiveness of the longbowmen.

### 02 Insult before injury

Men from either side goad each other across the recently ploughed fields. Both Henry and d'Albret are reluctant to take the initiative. The French want to starve the English out, while Henry knows that his strengths lie in keeping his forces compact.

### 04 French cavalry rush

After failing to attack the longbowmen when they were exposed while on the move, the French finally unleash their feared cavalry charge. The knights are followed closely by unmounted infantry as they near Henry's ranks.

### 03 The English advance

The French attack is not forthcoming, so Henry is forced to move. He orders his longbowmen forward and they take up a position in range of the French lines. Guarded by wooden stakes, they begin pummelling the French with arrows.

### 07 Attack on the baggage train

As the English take command the French dispatch a secondary force. The attack focuses on the English baggage train and initially catches Henry off guard. An angered Henry slaughters the French prisoners and the attack comes to nothing as the French begin to flee.



**08 English victory**

Scattered and leaderless, the French army is a spent force. They flee as the English ransack their camp. Henry claims a victory that reinvigorates the English cause in France. The Lancastrian phase of the war begins.

**06 The heat of battle**

The crazed horses unsaddle their riders and crash into the French infantry. The English line buckles, but in close quarters numbers mean nothing. The archers drop their bows and slash at the French with swords and axes.

**05 A hail of arrows**

The charge is miscalculated and reduces to walking pace as the horses get stuck in the muddy battlefield. They are now sitting ducks for the longbowmen, who fire rapidly at the French as the charge turns into a disorganised frenzy.

# THE LONGBOWMAN

FROM THE BATTLE OF SLUDDEN TO THE BATTLE OF AGINCOURT THE LONGBOW WAS ONE OF THE MOST FEARED WEAPONS ON THE MEDIEVAL BATTLEFIELD

## ARROWS

Many different types of arrowhead could be used with a longbow. The simplest was the bodkin point, and the majority of arrows could penetrate even the very toughest plate armour.

## SECONDARY WEAPONS

When engaged in close-quarters combat, the longbowmen would drop their bows and fight with swords, axes and clubs. This was a last resort as archers worked best at a distance.

*Due to their limited armour longbowmen were often positioned behind barricades or interspersed among troops with superior protection*

## TRAINING

The longbow would be nothing if it wasn't in the hands of a trained archer. All sports except archery were banned on Sundays and the most talented were drawn into the English army

## TACTICS

Longbowmen were vulnerable to cavalry so would attack from range and flank the enemy. Each archer carried 60-70 arrows, enabling up to about six minutes of virtually continuous fire.

## THE LONGBOW

Made out of yew, ash, oak or birch, the longbow originated in Wales. By the time of the Battle of Agincourt it was one of the most feared weapons on the medieval battlefield.

## ARMOUR

Unlike the men-at-arms, the longbowmen had very little armour except for a boiled leather jacket and occasionally a helmet. The tactics of an archer were based around being nimble and light-footed

## THE AGINCOURT CAROL

Deo gracias anglie  
redde pro victoria



Boucault in particular knew the English would starve if they went much longer without food. Henry was all too aware of this and finally roiled the dice as he ordered his longbowmen forward.

Kneeling and kissing the ground, the archers advanced until they were about 240 metres from the enemy lines. A trained archer could penetrate armour and kill or wound a target from up to 220 metres away. The French had already made their first error by not attacking the archers when they broke ranks and moved forward. D'Albret and Boucault were experienced soldiers but lacked the authority and respect that a king like Henry would receive from his men.

Unfortunately for the French, their king, Charles V, was still in Paris, unable to lead his army due to his failing mental health. Back at Agincourt several units of archers had secretly tracked through the forest surrounding the battlefield and into the nearby village of Tramecourt, creating another angle of attack for the English. Continuing undeterred, the longbowmen in the centre hammered stakes into the ground, fortifying their position in a tactic learned from previous conflicts in the war. At 11 a.m., on the king's order, the archers opened fire. In response, the French cavalry charged, followed by men-at-arms.

The longbowmen first shot galling arrows to purposely wound and disorientate the French ranks before switching to standard bodkin-point arrowheads. The combination of the narrow,

## "THE LONGBOWMEN IN THE CENTRE HAMMERED STAKES INTO THE GROUND, FORTIFYING THEIR POSITION IN A TACTIC LEARNED FROM PREVIOUS CONFLICTS IN THE WAR"

muddy battlefield and the severely undermanned charge saw the French knights slaughtered by the hail of English arrows, as their frightened and injured horses became uncontrollable. Any horses that got even remotely close were impaled on the stakes, and any that turned back crashed into the oncoming men-at-arms, blunting the attack. With the battleground now even more churned up by the horses' hooves, the foot troops moved forward painfully slowly. The area was so narrow that the French crossbowmen and artillery could not support their now-isolated foot soldiers, as a hail of arrows struck the exhausted infantry.

The French attack had just enough momentum to reach the enemy ranks, and at first the English line began to buckle under the strain. Knowing that leaving the narrow battlefield would result in annihilation, the English rallied as the longbowmen dropped their bows and took up swords and axes. The French men-at-arms were protected by thick plate armour, but the nimble archers had purposely shortened their swords and lances and would slash at any unprotected area, while the heaving press of French troops struggled to swing their powerful

broadswords effectively. The lines were such a mess that fallen troops were crushed down into the mud, unable to rise up again due to exhaustion and the 110-pound weight of the armour. Any Frenchman who fell drowned in the mud as his fellow soldiers tramped over him.

Within 30 minutes of fighting two of the three French lines had been completely destroyed. The Duke of Alençon lay dead in the mud, as did the French commander d'Albret. On the English side the dukes of York and Suffolk had been killed but Henry was still alive and so was his brother, the Duke of Gloucester, who Henry had defended valiantly in the heat of battle.

### Failed encirclement

Having witnessed the carnage, the decision was made for Isambart d'Agincourt and Robert de Bournonville, men with local knowledge, to target the rear of Henry's army. It was here that French prisoners the English had captured during their invasion were being held.

A small force of peasant fighters and knights quickly overwhelmed the limited English defenders



In the French ranks, nobles jostled for space so they could have their coat of arms displayed at the battle. The result was a chaotic mess.

putting them to the sword and plundering the English encampment, taking horses and even a royal crown in the process.

Enraged and also concerned at the possibility of a mass French counterattack, Henry ordered the killing of all his prisoners except on the highest-ranking nobles. The English men-at-arms refused, as this would clash with their chivalric code, so the archers took on the job, slaughtering them in cold blood. There were more prisoners than men in the whole English army, so this knee-jerk reaction was effective in nullifying any possibility of an uprising but severely lessened the opportunities for ransom after the battle.

On the frontline, a 600-man counterattack led by the counts of Marle and Fauquembergues had been a disaster. This setback was the final straw and the remaining French line withdrew. Around 8,000 Frenchmen (including one-third of the nobility present at the battle) had been killed, while the English dead only numbered in the low hundreds. Against all the odds, the English had won the battle convincingly.

### Aftermath

Ecstatic after their victory, the English broke into song, chanting early versions of the Agincourt Carol and other traditional celebratory tunes. The series of French mistakes had proved fatal and the location of the battle had essentially forfeited the numerical advantage of the full strength of the French cavalry had charged at the English, even the skilled longbowmen, who could fire up to six arrows a minute, and the courage of the men-at-arms, wouldn't have been able to hold them off.

Henry's army sacked the French camp and stripped the dead of everything of worth as soldiers

*Right: Unlike many of their counterparts, English men-at-arms and knights fought on foot. Below: It is thought that Henry ordered a service of thanksgiving on the battlefield after the English victory.*

## "THE ENGLISH MEN-AT-ARMS REFUSED TO KILL THE PRISONERS AS IT CLASHED WITH THEIR CHIVALRIC CODE, SO THE ARCHERS TOOK ON THE JOB, SLAUGHTERING THEM IN COLD BLOOD"

fled in all directions. That night the king held a banquet in nearby Maisons-lès-Louvres, which was served by captured French knights. After the emotion of the victory had died down, the weary men were unable to march on Paris, voicing concerns over a lack of siege weapons, and they withdrew back to the safety of Calais on 29 October. Despite the unlikely victory at Agincourt, minimal territory had been gained and Charles VI was still in power, but the French military had been broken on the field. Harfleur was now an English-controlled town and would be an effective launching pad for Henry's second invasion of Normandy in 1417. Burgundy, meanwhile, still refused to strike a deal with the House of Valois as the French kingdom's enemies began to stack up.

Despite the gains, Henry sailed back to England and after his nobles voiced fears over the possibility of a costly winter campaign. He returned to a hero's welcome and after a few more years of successful campaigning would draw up the Treaty of Troyes in 1420, recognising him as regent and heir to the French throne. The failures of Agincourt had made the French hesitant to fight pitched battles, which contributed to English victories at the 1416 Battle of the Seine and the 1418 siege at Rouen.

Henry's French conquests were hugely successful, but the strain on his kingdom's finances was beginning to tell and would eventually signal the beginning of the end for the Lancastrian monarchy in his later years.

The king died in 1422, meaning he never officially became the king of France. After his sudden death, English fortunes on the continent

took a turn for the worse, and when the Wars of the Roses broke out in England in 1455 control of France slipped from the new teenage King Henry VI's grasp. The famous victory at Agincourt was now in the past and the era of Joan of Arc and the return of French military power was at hand.





# ROYAL STRATEGY

Dr Matthew Bennett discusses the king's command and the French hesitation

**D**r Matthew Bennett recently retired after a full career as senior lecturer at The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. He is a medieval military historian and contributed the battle account in the catalogue for the Agincourt 600 exhibition at the Tower of London. His publications include *Agincourt: Triumph Against the Odds* (Osprey, 1991) and several specialist studies of English archery tactics used in the Hundred Years' War.

**How did Henry V's campaign plan in 1415 differ from Edward III's Crécy campaign in 1346?**

There is no doubt that Henry was inspired by the achievements of his great-grandfather. Edward had invaded Normandy via the Cherbourg peninsula, sacked Caen and advanced to just north of Paris, challenging the French king to battle. He then withdrew northwards to Poitou where he was victorious at Crécy. The following year he besieged the bridgehead port of Calais. In contrast, Henry landed at Harfleur, in the mouth of the River Seine, capturing it after a bitter siege, and then marched to Calais.

**Was the planned expedition popular at court and among the nobility?**

Generally, the war against France – fought in France – was desirable to the military aristocracy because it offered opportunities for glory, plunder and lands. Richard II's unpopular peace policy had been an important factor in Henry Bolingbroke's 1399 usurpation. Young Henry had proved his valour in his first battle at Shrewsbury in 1403, aged only 16, where he was wounded in the face by an arrow. As king, Henry V won support from the nobility but also the financiers of the City of London and its lord mayor, Richard Whittington, who recognised a good investment.

**How did the long siege of Harfleur affect Henry's**

**objectives and plans?**

The 12,000-strong English army landed in mid-August and a month-long siege ensued. The garrison was a bare 300 men, but the town of Harfleur was well fortified by walls and 24 towers together with ditches and a moat on the seaward side. Siege artillery, both gunpowder and traction, pounded the main gate, which was protected by a wooden bulwark. The unsanitary conditions of the siege lines caused an epidemic of dysentery, which killed or incapacitated some 2,000 of the English, including its leaders. When Harfleur finally surrendered on 22 September, it seemed that Henry's plans had suffered a serious check.

**What should we make of the story that Henry originally intended to march south to Bordeaux and Guyenne and what would have happened had he done so?**

The English Crown also held lands in Aquitaine, so marching south would have emphasised the link with these ancient possessions. However, it was late in the year for campaigning and it would have required significant logistical support. Known as a *chevauchée*, such expeditions could have a symbolic effect, but in the latter years of Edward III's reign there had been several disastrous attempts of this nature. The French had learned not to confront English armies but to harry them and deny them provisions, so the risk for Henry was too great.

**Why did Henry march on land to Calais rather than take a safer passage by sea?**

This was indeed the question that Henry's chief advisers asked the king! They feared that the English army would be caught like sheep in a fold as French forces combined against it. The answer must be that Henry was making a statement about his right to march wherever he wanted in a country he claimed that he had the right to rule. He may also have contemplated winning a decisive action against the French, as Edward had done 69 years earlier.

**Were there any skirmishes with the French**

**en route to Agincourt? If so, were any of them significant?**

The French, who had not attempted to relieve Harfleur, merely shadowed the English line of march when the army set out. They relied on blocking the bridges and fords of the River Somme. Faced with this obstacle, Henry was forced to lead his men southeast, away from the direct route to Calais, and the English supplies soon ran out. He did manage to cross near Péronne, which was a week's march from his destination, but the French still avoided combat.

**Left: An English Henry V halfpenny on the front. Henry's campaign strained the nation's finances**



*Right: Dr Matthew Bennett regularly lectures about medieval warfare*

**Did Henry ever consider cutting his losses and turning back? Were there any mutinies or desertions?**

The sources do not really provide an answer. In the light of the stunning victory at Agincourt, any dissension may have been written out of the record. The churchman who wrote an eyewitness account of the campaign, *The Deeds of Henry V*, does admit that the soldiers were often uncertain and frightened. However, the king kept strict discipline, enforcing regulations and hanging pilagers. Also, the risk of leaving the army and being at the mercy of the enraged French peasantry was probably greater than keeping together.

**Why were the French, with a much larger army and home advantage, so hesitant to engage the English?**

This is the key question. First, French strategy remained non-confrontational. Second, they hoped to wear the English down before challenging them to battle. Third, it may be that they did not actually have a huge advantage. This is certainly the argument of Professor Anne Curry in her book *Agincourt: A New History*. Her study of the English documentary records indicates that the army may have been 9,000 strong. In contrast, France was in the midst of a civil war, with a mad king and rival Burgundian and Armagnac factions. Their commanders were bitterly divided and it may be that all their forces did not come up to fight. They had a greater number of fully armoured men at arms, but their botched battle plan meant that they failed to utilise them effectively.

**What sort of condition was the English army in on the eve of Agincourt?**

The English set out with a week's rations but had been on the road for 16 days. They had subsisted on nuts, berries and dirty water. Anne Curry points out that although no source states that they were suffering from diarrhoea, it seems likely. The archers are described as rolling down their hose (leg coverings) to the knee. This strongly suggests that their bows were running. They may well have been weakened, but they were both desperate and inspired by a charismatic leader, which was enough to win the day.



# A CLASH OF EMPIRES

## 48 BATTLE OF GRAVELINES

Reluctant on forcing England back into the Catholic fold, King Philip I of Spain amassed a formidable invasion force, but his armada would founder along with his ambitions in the English Channel.

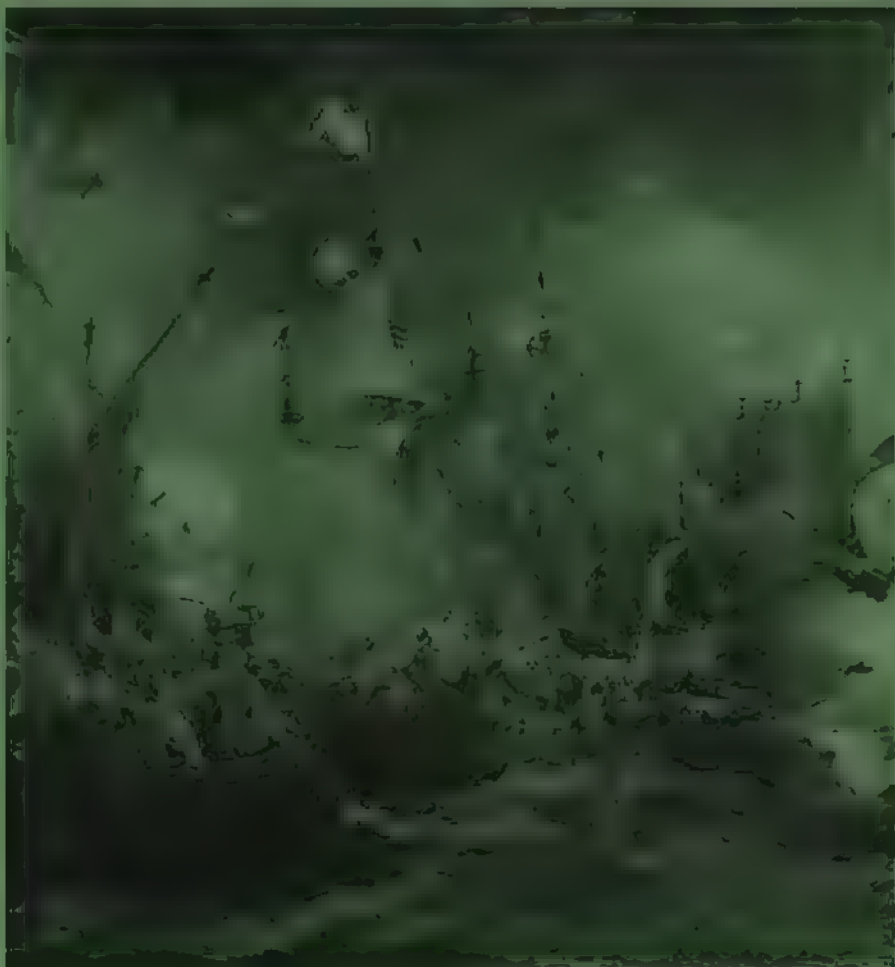
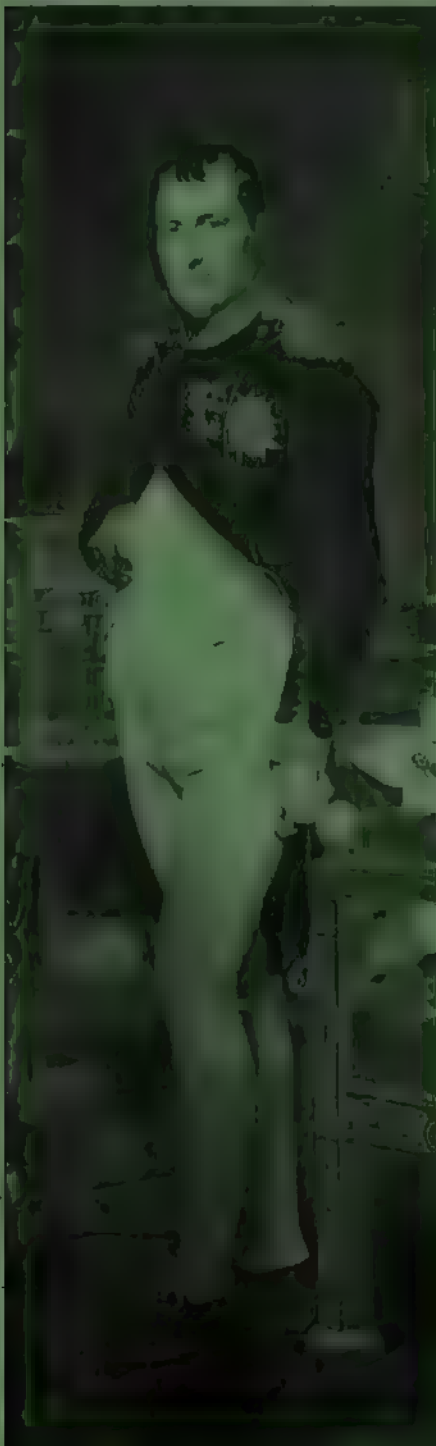
## 54 NAPOLEON'S DEATH MARCH

Determined to teach his erstwhile ally a serious lesson, the Emperor of France marched a force of over half a million men into Russia. Most of them would never see their homeland again.

## 66 CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

Contempt, confusion and downright bad luck would conspire to send hundreds of men into a valley of death and the annals of history.







### SMALL ROUND SHIELD

Famous for their mubarizun duellists, Muslim infantrymen carried these small shields to make them more mobile in hand-to-hand combat.

### STRIPED ENSIGN

Along with the St George's Cross of England's patron saint, English ships sailed into battle under a striped ensign that denoted different squadrons. This made it easier for commanders to keep track of the battle and for captains to ensure they were in formation amid the smoke, fire and chaos of a close quarter naval engagement.

# BATTLE OF GRAVELINES

ENGLISH CHANNEL, JULY-AUGUST 1588

WORDS CHARLES GINGER

**A**s has often been the case throughout the history of empires and conquest, it was a combination of greed, self-righteousness and a desire to punish a troublesome neighbour that inspired King Philip II of Spain to attempt to invade England in 1588.

As ruler of the largest empire in the world at the time, Philip's power was unrivalled, but this didn't translate into a reign of peace and contentment for his subjects, especially those residing in the Netherlands. A Spanish possession when its crown passed to King Philip II in 1556, since 1568 the Netherlands had been in revolt against its foreign overlords. However, it was not alone in its efforts; a neighbour to the northwest was all too willing to provide aid – England. Such a blatant disregard for his rule and the



## THE ENGLISH FLEET

With armed merchant vessels and shallow-hulled Dutch flyboats vastly outnumbering the 34 warships in the fleet, the English Navy couldn't match the Spanish invasion force in terms of firepower. Those few English battleships, however, were smaller than their Spanish counterparts, meaning they had fewer guns but also a lower profile and greater speed.

## FIRESHIP

Significantly outgunned, the English launched six fireships against the Spanish fleet. These were a unique terror to early modern vessels which were made of wood, caulked with tar, and filled with gunpowder. Even the ropes were greased with fat, making the bulk of the ship highly flammable. Fireships were usually steered by a skeleton crew who would abandon ship at the last minute.

*The English sent eight fireships into the Spanish fleet outside Calais.*

sovereignty of his sprawling empire was never going to be ignored by Philip, and when Elizabeth I opted to relieve Mary, Queen of Scots (a devout Catholic) of her head, King Philip's restraint snapped. The Protestant thorn in his side would have to be removed, and the only way to extract it would be to invade England and restore Catholicism to its people, many of whom Philip believed would rise up in support of their religious saviours as they landed on the English coast. He also had the express support of Pope Sixtus V, who viewed the entire enterprise as a crusade, an electric word bound to invigorate the men set to embark on it.

Such an undertaking was never going to be a simple one, and a vast and well-supplied fleet would take time to organise. Fortunately for Philip, the Pope

permitted him to levy 'crusade taxes', which went a long way to funding the planned invasion. However, neither divine favour nor convenient taxation could prevent Francis Drake's raid on Cadiz in April 1587, which saw 30 ships put out of action and vital supplies seized, pushing the Armada's expedition back by a year.

Further problems occurred in February of the following year when the man chosen to lead the fleet, Álvaro de Bazán, a vastly experienced (and some say undefeated) admiral, died, forcing Philip to elect the Duke of Medina Sidonia, Alonso Pérez de Guzmán, to the position. Aware of his own limitations, de Guzmán immediately appealed against his unexpected elevation in the form of a letter to the king, but his efforts were foiled when royal advisors intercepted it.

Despite its inauspicious beginning, the Armada finally set sail from Lisbon on 28 May 1588, putting 160 ships, approximately 32,400 men (of which around 21,500 were soldiers) and 2,400 cannons to sea in the process. Such a force seemed destined to suppress all opposition and restore the heathen nation of England to Catholicism, or at the very least put an end to any English support of the United Provinces (seven states in the Netherlands that had succeeded in ousting the Spanish).

Unfortunately, the plan that this vast fleet was due to follow was anything but simple.

The ships were ordered to sail for the Spanish Netherlands, where awaiting their arrival stood an army of 30,000 men under the command of the brilliant Duke of Parma. Under the cover of the



Queen Elizabeth I addresses the troops mustered at Tilbury

Spanish ships Parma's troops would be conveyed to England (Kent specifically), where they would make land and begin the invasion. Having successfully stunted the Dutch revolt and returned the southern cities (which today are in Belgium) to Spanish control, Parma, an Italian by the name of Alessandro Farnese would prove a formidable threat to any English hopes of pushing the invaders back into the sea. Then the weather intervened.

As it would throughout the Armada's ultimately doomed expedition, the elements turned against it, forcing some of its number to return to port. Then, on 19 July, any hope of maintaining the element of surprise evaporated when the fleet was spotted off the coast of Cornwall. A series of beacons were immediately lit, sending news to London of the presence of the Spanish. The stage seemed set for a

decisive engagement. With the English fleet unable to sail out of Plymouth harbour due to the tide, it was suggested to de Guzmán that the moment had come to strike. Unfortunately for King Philip II's ambitions, de Guzmán prevaricated and then decided not to act, claiming that engaging the English had not been approved by the king. It was a decision both would come to regret.

As the Spanish made for the Isle of Wight, English fortunes rapidly shifted, the fleet under Lord Howard of Effingham and Francis Drake was now able to escape its containment and pursue the Armada.

As the sun rose on the morning of 21 July the English, by now anchored off Plymouth and having seized the advantage of being upwind of the rfoes (known as gaining the weather gauge), moved to engage the enemy.

Conscious of the fact that the Spanish fleet was trained to unleash its cannons in one furious burst before rushing up to the top deck and preparing to board their stricken victim, the English wisely kept their distance, firing at range while being sure to maximise their speed advantage to keep out of the reach of Spanish grapples. However, while this meant that they didn't lose a single ship during the encounter, it also spared the Spanish, who arranged in a convex arc formation, withstood the barrage easily, only losing two ships (Rosario and San Salvador) when they collided.

As the smoke of the cannons dissipated Drake found himself consumed by a familiar urge to loot the ailing Spanish ships that had smashed into one another earlier in the day. While doing so would secure both useful information and valuable supplies, it very nearly cost the English fleet, and therefore England as a whole, dearly.

In order to approach his targets Drake required the cover of darkness, so as night fell he extinguished the lantern aboard the Revenge. In doing so he instantly plunged the rest of the English fleet into confusion, for they were relying on the light in order to follow his

lead and maintain formation. As the captains of the ships scrambled to restore order Drake set about boarding and stripping the Spanish vessels, relieving them of gunpowder and — no doubt his favoured prize — gold. He also gained a strategically vital insight into the interior design of the Spanish galleons, which had extremely compact gun decks laden with supplies. As a result, the sailors manning the guns had very little room to manoeuvre, and Drake quickly deduced that reloading and re-firing the Spanish cannons must be a tricky and time-consuming endeavour.

The English spent the following day (22 July) catching up to the Spanish, who had made good use of their 24-hour advantage.

However, they couldn't mitigate the speed of the English ships, who managed to catch up with them. The next day the men under Effingham and Drake's command formed up in preparation for battle, and while a minor skirmish achieved nothing, a full-throttled assault soon after saw four separate English squadrons racing towards their Iberian foes, forcing the Spanish back and thereby preventing them from anchoring safely in the Solent to await news of Parma's army.

Reluctant to risk defeat, de Guzmán instead opted to make for the safety of Calais. This seemingly prudent retreat would prove to be a fatal error.

Having reached Calais on 27 July, the Spanish lowered their anchors in anticipation of collecting Parma's force of 30,000 well-equipped troops from Dunkirk. Word soon reached them that quickly



King Philip II was determined to restore Catholicism



Spanish hopes of invading Protestant England were scattered along with its ships



disabused them of this notion. Parma's army had been almost halved by disease and was in fact not ready to embark. The Armada's growing problems were compounded by the news that Dunkirk was being blockaded by valiant Dutch flyboats steered by men who knew all too well that the formidable Spanish ships were too large to sail into the shallow waters off the coast of the Netherlands. Parma was now stranded with no hope of rescue and the blockade was the death knell for any dreams of springing his men to England. To say that overlooking this potential impediment was an oversight by King Philip's advisors would be an understatement.

As de Guzmán no doubt prevaricated over what to do next the English were plotting a blazing denouement for his fleet. Understandably nervous of lone ships being preyed on, de Guzmán ordered the Armada to drop anchor off Calais in a tight formation, hoping for safety in numbers. What he hadn't catered for was the English turning this otherwise reasonable decision against the Spanish by exploiting their compact ranks.

With the hour approaching midnight, the silence of the port of Calais was suddenly split by a ripple of panic as the Spanish watched no less than eight fire ships bearing down on them, each one stripped of any unnecessary weight and then crammed to the deck with brimstone, pitch, tar and gunpowder.

Fearing that the looming fire ships were in fact 'hellburners' (ships filled with gunpowder charges) the majority of the Armada hastily cut their lines and



## HABSBURG SPAIN

NUMBER OF SHIPS

160

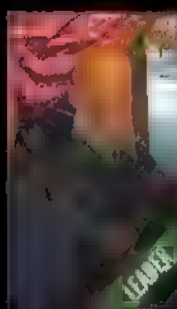


NUMBER OF SAILORS

32,400

APPROX. NUMBER OF CANNON

2,400



### ALONSO PÉREZ DE GUZMÁN

Appointed by King Philip II despite his protestations, de Guzmán did his best, but his lack of military experience ultimately proved telling.

- Reorganised fleet and bolstered its numbers
- Reluctantly took control after stressing his lack of experience

## SAN MARTIN

The flagship of the Spanish Armada saved a fellow galleon by fighting off 15 English ships alone for an hour.

- A beast of the seas armed with 48 guns
- Compact interior made reloading cannons incredibly difficult



## SWORD

The Spanish favoured boarding weapons such as the sword as they were trained to fire their cannons once then prepare to leap onto the enemy's vessel.

- Ideal for close-quarters fighting on a cramped deck
- Useless at Gravelines as the English kept their distance



## ENGLAND

APPROX. NUMBER OF SHIPS

200

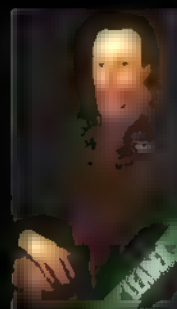


NUMBER OF SAILORS

18,000

NUMBER OF CANNON

3,000



### FRANCIS DRAKE

Heralded as a daring national treasure, Sir Francis Drake had 25 years of sailing and battling on the high seas behind him before the Armada set sail on orders from King Philip.

- Vast experience in waging war at sea
- The promise of fame and fortune could cloud his judgement

## THE REVENGE

Led by Sir Francis Drake, this pioneering race-built galleon led the English fleet to victory at Gravelines.

- Fast, well-armed thanks to 46 guns, and captained by Drake
- Despite being small at 400 tons it cost £4,000 to build



## CULVERIN CANNON

Deriving its name from the Latin for 'of the nature of a snake', this versatile gun became an English favourite in the late 16th century.

- Offered a long, flat trajectory and a high muzzle velocity
- Slow to reload and often so heavy as to be immobile



Culverin (1490).

sailed for safety, leaving de Guzmán and the main Spanish warships behind.

While the flaming missiles failed to severely damage any of the Spanish fleet, they did succeed in shattering the previously formidable crescent shape of the Armada. The field had been leveled and the scene was set for a decisive encounter off the Belgian port of Gravelines.

Aware that in order to inflict sufficient damage they would have to close on the enemy to within 100 yards, the English sailed forth and unleashed a torrent of cannon and musket fire. Swathes of Spanish gunners fell in the maelstrom of metal as the broadsides of the Armada's vessels began to splinter, causing a number of ships to list precariously as their sailors scrambled to return fire. After eight hours of fighting five Spanish ships were drifting below the waves and the English were beginning to pull back as their guns ran empty.

The English 'victory' at Gravelines sent the final cannonball into the hull of King Philip II's dreams of conquering England and re-establishing Catholicism, but in truth any threat to the realm of Elizabeth I went up in a cloud of smoke the moment news of Parma's entrapment reached de Guzmán.

Elizabeth's famous address at Tilbury sounds somewhat less dramatic when one considers that by the time she gave it, inspiring as it was, the danger had long since passed.

Having prevaricated when decisiveness was required, having held back when a final push could have established a vital foothold, de Guzmán was guilty of many failings, but the doom of the Armada does not rest squarely upon his shoulders. From its conception the plan was destined to flounder, sunk by poor planning and the impetuous whims of a ruler bent on reminding an irritating neighbour of his far-reaching powers.

Having sailed for Scotland following its mauling off Gravelines, the Armada was almost completely obliterated by storms as it made for home. Upon hearing that less than 10,000 of his men had made it home, and many of them ill or dying, King Philip is said to have lambasted the interference of "God's winds and waves."

In the years that followed the reigning naval power of Spain was gradually cancelled out by the emerging seaborne prowess of the English, with both sides sending fleets to harass the other before the inevitability of a peace pact finally became clear to both, culminating in the Treaty of London in 1604. By then King Philip had been dead six years, his hopes of putting an end to England's infernal interference in his internal affairs well and truly dashed.

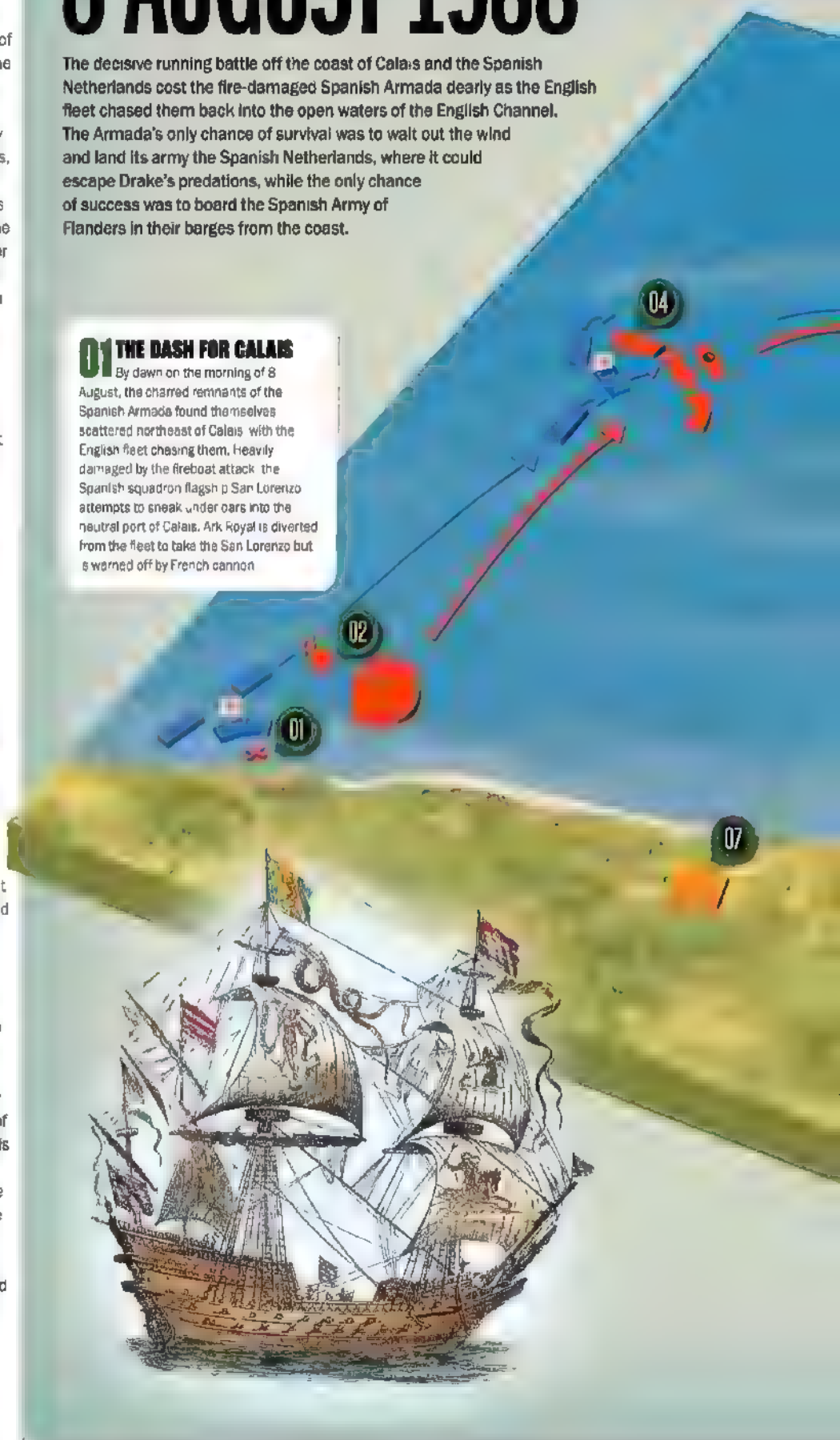
In the centuries to come Spain's dominance on the global stage would begin to wane, while the influence of England would flourish, seeing it establish an empire beyond compare, one upon which the sun never set. How different the history of the world would have been had de Guzmán managed to land upon England's shores and unleash the full might of the Duke of Parma's hordes.

# 8 AUGUST 1588

The decisive running battle off the coast of Calais and the Spanish Netherlands cost the fire-damaged Spanish Armada dearly as the English fleet chased them back into the open waters of the English Channel. The Armada's only chance of survival was to wait out the wind and land its army in the Spanish Netherlands, where it could escape Drake's predations, while the only chance of success was to board the Spanish Army of Flanders in their barges from the coast.

## 01 THE DASH FOR CALAIS

By dawn on the morning of 8 August, the charred remnants of the Spanish Armada found themselves scattered northeast of Calais, with the English fleet chasing them. Heavily damaged by the fireboat attack, the Spanish squadron flagship San Lorenzo attempts to sneak under oars into the neutral port of Calais. Ark Royal is diverted from the fleet to take the San Lorenzo but is warned off by French cannon.





**02 THE DUKE PLAYS FOR TIME**

San Martín, the Duke of Medina Sidonia's flagship, and four other galleons place themselves between the English and the bruised Armada. Over two hours the brave Spaniards fight a delaying action against the English, giving the Armada time to reform. Despite overwhelming odds, the five Spanish warships managed to make it back to the Armada and take their places in the formation.

**"UNFORTUNATELY FOR KING PHILIP II'S AMBITIONS, DE GUZMÁN PREVARICATED AND THEN DECIDED NOT TO ACT"**

**03 HIDDEN DANGERS**

The Armada are unable to dash straight for the coast of the Spanish Netherlands and the waiting Spanish Army of Flanders as Dutch rebels have removed the sea marks. These navigation aids revealed the presence of the Shoals of Flanders, submerged sand banks that had to be navigated with caution lest vessels run aground.

**04 THE BATTLE IS JOINED**

The English, now reinforced by the ships carrying the San Lorenzo at Calais, launch an attack on the right flank of the Spanish Armada, which had formed a crescent with its supply ships protected at the rear. The lighter English ships are easily able to flank the slower Spanish and get close enough to unleash musket volleys as well as cannon fire. Keeping the wind at their backs, the English position themselves so that the Spanish hulls are raised towards them, exposing the vulnerable hull below the waterline.

**05 THE BATTLE FLOUNDERS**

Still in formation, the Spanish Armada is heavily battle damaged, but by the afternoon the English are starting to run out of ammunition, with some gunners loading chain and other debris into the guns to keep the pressure on. After eight hours of fighting the English pull away and the Spanish use the breathing space to begin repairs, but as the wind rises their opportunity to make for the Spanish Netherlands departs on the breeze.

**06 THE SPANISH ESCAPE**

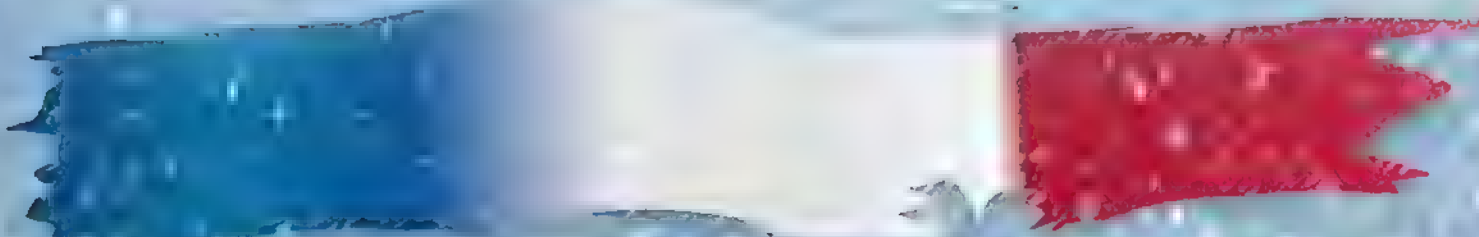
With the Spanish right flank and rear badly damaged, the formation begins to collapse. Medina Sidonia leads another delaying action to cover the Spanish retreat as the Armada is driven out into the North Sea.

**07 EAST AWAY**

The Duke of Parma's Spanish Army of Flanders - a multinational chiefly concerned with suppressing Dutch revolt - never joins the Spanish Armada and never poses a serious threat to the Kingdom of England.

**08 SHALLOW WATER PIRATES**

Allied to England, shallow-hulled flyboats commanded by the rebel Dutch waited in the sandbanks. Able to traverse the dangerous waters around the coast, they were poised to harry the Spanish Army of Flanders if its barges set out to join the mauled Armada.



# NAPOLEON'S DEATH MARCH

RUSSIA, 24 JUNE - 14 DECEMBER 1812

How a doomed invasion of Russia shattered the illusion of Napoleon's invincibility  
and sowed the seeds for his exile and ultimate demise

JOHN HARRIS





**A**s with many wars before and since, Napoleon's invasion of Russia began with a ruse. The French Emperor had massed an army of half a million men on the banks of the River Niemen, but he feared that if he were seen on the frontlines the Russians would know that an attack was imminent. He therefore switched uniforms with Colonel Pagowski of the 6th Polish Lancers and, disguised as the Polish officer, trotted forwards for a final reconnaissance of the Russian position. Just a few hours later, on the evening of Tuesday 23 June 1812, he launched his vast and multinational army across the river. The Russians, aghast and astonished, fell back as the Napoleonic juggernaut rolled into Russia.

This invasion was a momentous event and would have lasting consequences, but its origins lay in a peace treaty signed five years before between Napoleon, Emperor of the French, and Alexander, Tsar of Russia. There, on a raft on the quietly flowing Niemen, the two had agreed on war (with England) and peace (with each other). However, closing ports to British ships hurt Russia, just as the strengthening of French power in Germany and Poland threatened Russia's interests.

By 1810, the Tsar was distancing himself from a relationship that was rapidly turning sour. Napoleon, never one to tolerate disobedience, began to move forces eastwards. In the spring of 1812, Russia, having sensed the coming crisis, made peace with Sweden and the Turks and waited for the storm to break.

It was quite a storm. Napoleon had at his immediate disposal an army of 450,000 men and would call upon reserves and supports on either flank, elements that would boost this total to around 600,000 men. Although the majority of these were French, a large proportion came from his German, Italian and Polish vassals. Napoleon had made sure to secure Prussian cooperation, while Napoleon's father-in-law, Emperor Francis of Austria, also reluctantly provided 40,000 men.

It looked as though Europe had united against Russia. But Russia had distance and manpower as well as patriotic indignation on her side. So it was that as Napoleon drove for his first objective, Vilnius, which fell four days into the campaign, the Russians opted to fall back in an orderly retreat, eluding that killer blow so essential to the Napoleonic art of winning wars. The French were therefore obliged to lunge forwards in a series of exhausting offensives, and these forced marches through dusty, endless plains took a heavy toll on the young soldiers and, just as importantly, on the army's horses. Both dropped in their thousands and a countryside stripped bare of supplies finished thousands more as they marched onwards. Heinrich von Brandt, whose Polish regiment was full of new recruits, soon saw that regiments like his "were trailing stragglers, who could be seen stretched out along the sides of the road, mixed up with the dead horses."

Napoleon pushed on regardless. The Russians, while occasionally turning to hit back at the French, were making for the white, protective



Napoleon as he looked in 1812 ahead of the invasion of Russia



# "THE FRENCH WERE FORCED TO LAUNCH A SERIES OF ASSAULTS AND FIGHT THEIR WAY INTO THE BURNING CITY"

walls of Smolensk, where they would combine the armies of generals Barclay and Bagration. The Russians were caught between the humiliation of constant retreat and the risk of having their armies destroyed by the greatest captain of the age. For now, cautious heads prevailed, and, fearful that they might be cut off from Moscow, the generals ordered the retreat to resume.

Napoleon rode up to Smolensk on his birthday and was disappointed to see just the Russian rearguard present while lengthy columns flowed eastwards. The rearguard was a tough one and the French were forced to launch a series of assaults and fight their way into the burning city. Smolensk was soon a horror to behold. An Italian officer described his regiment's first night in the city: "We spent that night surrounded by ashes and bodies. The dying, the wounded, the living men, women and children, filled the cathedral and whose families, tears in their eyes, fear and terror in their faces, sheltered in the aisles."

Having seized the smouldering ruins, Napoleon now faced a dilemma. He could stay over winter in Smolensk, consolidating his hold over lands many of his Polish allies saw as rightfully theirs while also bringing up reserves and stockpiling supplies. Or he could push deeper into Russian territory in the hope that the Russians would stumble during his preferred war of movement or that the fall of Moscow would bring them to their knees. He fatefully chose to advance.

The Russians, fearing they were running out of land to trade for time, soon raised the stakes by appointing the one commander, General








Kutuzov, who had the nerve to face Napoleon. On 29 August, Napoleon learned that the one-eyed Kutuzov had reached the army and rightly assumed that the Russians were now resolved to prevent him tramping further on the Russian heartlands. Kutuzov had indeed deployed in the ancient hills and newer earthworks close to the little village of Borodino. It was there that the Russian general now waited, his 120,000 men and 640 guns ready to bar Napoleon's way to Moscow. Napoleon, massing 128,000 men and 580 guns, came in for the kill.

Vanguard met rearguard on 4 September, and, on the 6th, the French Emperor sent column after column against the Russian positions. Thousands were mown down in attack and counterattack, with positions won and lost from dawn to dusk. The action was concentrated in the centre, and it was there that Napoleon's son-in-law, Prince Eugene, managed to seize Borodino village even while the French floundered before the Russian Grand Redoubt. That afternoon the French made a final convulsive effort to capture the Russian earthworks, sending armoured cavalry up the slopes to crash into the massed ranks of exhausted Russian infantry. This was the decisive moment, but Napoleon, reluctant to engage his best reserves so far from home, hesitated, and the Russians, beaten but not broken, pulled their men out of range.

Napoleon's army suffered an appalling 40,000 casualties (including 49 generals), while the Russians lost as many as 47,000 men. Leaving General Junot's Germans the unenviable task of

## THE GREAT IMPERIAL RACE

Napoleon had some competition to build the greatest empire in history

	<b>Napoleon</b> (First French Empire - 1804-1814) ■■■   21
	<b>Alexander The Great</b> (Macedonian Empire - 336-323 BCE) ■■■■■■   5
	<b>Thutmose III</b> (18th Dynasty Egypt - 1479-1425 BCE) ■   18
	<b>Ashoka The Great</b> (Maurya Dynasty - 268-232 BCE) ■■■■■   5
	<b>Julius Caesar</b> (Roman Republic - 49-44 BCE) ■■■   2.75
	<b>Attila</b> (Hunnic Empire - 434-453) ■■■■   4
	<b>Charlemagne</b> (Frankish Empire - 800-814) ■   1
	<b>Genghis Khan</b> (Mongol Empire - 1206-1227) ■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■   11.5
	<b>Tamerlane</b> (Timurid Empire - 1370-1405) ■■■■■   4
*Distances in million km at greatest extent of empire	



The retreat from Moscow was as swift as the Grande Armée could muster



Due to a rather reckless approach Napoleon lost as many men approaching Moscow as he did retreating from it



Events in Russia led to further defeats and eventual exile for Napoleon

## "THE FRENCH WOULD BE DENIED THE RECOVERY THEY SO BADLY NEEDED"

clearing away the bodies, Napoleon staggered on for Moscow, just 70 miles distant. It took the French a week before they caught sight of the golden spires of the former capital. The city was invitingly empty, the Russians having evacuated civilians, while Kutuzov, after conferring with his generals, had determined to spare what was left of his army by withdrawing southwards towards Kaluga. The Russians saw that Moscow would act like a sponge, absorbing the French while they reorganised in fresher territory. They would also make sure the French would be denied the recovery they so badly needed. On the evening of 15 September, just a day after the Great Army had marched into its sombre streets, Moscow erupted.

Russian saboteurs had removed the fire pumps and torched the city, and, while the Kremlin and parts of Moscow remained untouched, most of Moscow was consumed in a terrible fire. The blow to French morale was enormous. The Russians were signalling that there would be no surrender, no more treaties on rafts, just war to the death. And death surrounded Moscow that autumn, for every time the French sent out parties for supplies or tried to collect fodder for their famished horses they were intercepted by vengeful Cossacks and gallant light cavalry.

It was the same all along Napoleon's lines of communication, which stretched precariously across the scorched earth between Moscow and Vilnius. Worse, Russian armies were now coming up from the Balkans and down from Sweden, massing to cut that essential conduit for supplies, reinforcements and information. Napoleon, for once irresolute, tried to wring peace from the Tsar but his overtures were rejected, and so reluctantly Napoleon determined on retreat from Moscow.

On 16 October preparations were made for the wounded to be evacuated, but news that Joachim Murat had been ambushed at Tarutino precipitated a more disorganised exodus. The French were soon streaming out of the city, the hungry soldiers bringing away with them wagons laden with whatever loot they could get their hands on, while, a week later, in an act of spite the Kremlin was mined and partially destroyed. By that time the French vanguard, seeking to breakthrough to the south, was already in trouble as it encountered fresh Russian troops on the road to Kaluga. Napoleon and his marshals, fearing that they could ill afford another Borodino, altered course and returned to the hunger grounds along the old Moscow-Smolensk road. The infamous retreat had begun in earnest.

On 29 October the French crossed over the fields of slaughter at Borodino, but the weather was still fresh and bright. Bright enough for Napoleon's soldiers to see the columns of Cossacks who now appeared on either flank, shepherding them through barren fields and ruined



With over 20,000 casualties, the Battle of Smolensk was one of the bloodiest of the invasion

## THE STORY SO FAR

A crash course in Napoleonic history before 1812



### NAPOLEON ASCENDENT 1796

It's a big year for 27-year-old Napoleon Bonaparte as he is made commander in chief of the army of Italy, marries Joséphine de Beauharnais in a civil ceremony and achieves victories at Lodi, Arcore and early in 1797 in Rivoli as well, leading to the retreat of Austria and further establishing Bonaparte's leadership.

### FIRST CONSUL 1799

Having been fighting in Egypt, Napoleon returns to Paris with the ruling Directory unpopular with the masses. He receives a hero's welcome thanks to his exploits (despite some failures) and leads a successful coup d'état. Napoleon is made first consul for ten years, leading this newly formed government.



### LEADER FOR LIFE 1802

With the signing of the Treaty of Amiens with Britain, the promise of peace in Europe seems at hand. Napoleon's popularity at home couldn't be higher: the economy is turning around for the better and as a result the Consulate is made permanent, making Napoleon first Consul for life.





As Napoleon retreated, the Russians continued to attack, such as at the Berezina river



villages. Then, on 4 November, the snow began to fall. Men would slip and fall by the wayside or exhaust themselves combing through endless drifts. Horses, not shod for winter, collapsed and were soon eaten, while wagons and guns were abandoned. And every morning, around dying camp fires, more and more men remained slumped, unable or unwilling to continue. Those who could were heading for whatever sanctuary Smolensk could provide. Smolensk, however, proved a disappointment. The supplies that had been carefully hoarded were lost when a mass of hungry fugitives broke into the city's warehouses and plundered them.

The retreat resumed on 12 November, but the Russians were gaining in confidence and sliced

into the long columns trailing out of the city on 16 November at Krasnoi. Three army corps were nearly cut off and only Napoleon's Imperial Guard turning back to savage the Russians saved the French from a decisive defeat. Victory briefly raised French hopes, but bad news soon destroyed them.

The Russian armies from the Balkans, directed by Admiral Chichagov, had arrived from the south and had easily scattered French detachments around Minsk. They had then pushed on to cut the French line of retreat at Borisov on the River Berezina. The bridge there was burnt in the fighting, effectively stranding Napoleon's exhausted troops as the Russian vanguard snapped at their heels and their right flank. It was a moment of dire crisis, of tragedy even, but from

it came one of the greatest examples of heroism in the history of warfare.

General Corbineau's light cavalry had discovered a ford near Studianka where the water was just 1.5 metres deep, and Napoleon urged generals Eblé and Chasseloup to build two makeshift bridges there from the timbers of the ruined village. The French and Dutch engineers wading into the icy but fast-moving water, worked the miracle as divers onary feints kept Chichagov's men, starved of information on the western bank, away from the construction of the 100-metre-long bridges. Thanks to the exertions of the freezing but heroic engineers, Napoleon's infantry and horseless cavalry were soon streaming across one rickety construction while what was left of his artillery, as



## FROM TURMOIL TO EMPEROR 1804

1804 begins with Haiti declaring its independence and a new assassination plot involving the former ruling Bourbon family. The resultant execution of the Duke of Enghien sets Europe on course for the Napoleonic Wars and for Napoleon himself to be elected emperor of France.

## DEFEAT AND VICTORY 1805

Following coronation for himself and Josephine in France, Napoleon is also crowned King of Italy in Milan, but a new coalition against France has been forming. Napoleon is defeated at Trafalgar by the British Royal Navy, but just a couple of months later he achieves a significant victory at Austerlitz against Austria and Russia.



## DESPERATE FOR AN HEIR 1810

Apparently driven by concern over not conceiving an heir, Napoleon divorces Josephine and, cementing his new alliance with Austria, marries Archduchess Marie Louise, eldest child of the Habsburg emperor. The following March Napoleon François Charles Joseph Bonaparte is born.



# THE INVASION IN NUMBERS

Breaking down how Napoleon's invasion fell apart

**2** Auxiliary forces break off from the main troop and head for Polotsk where from 17 August they establish Napoleon's northern flank of the invasion.

**1** 24 June 1812, the Grande Armée crosses the Neman River into Russia. It consists of 550,000 to 600,000 men, the largest fighting force assembled at that time.

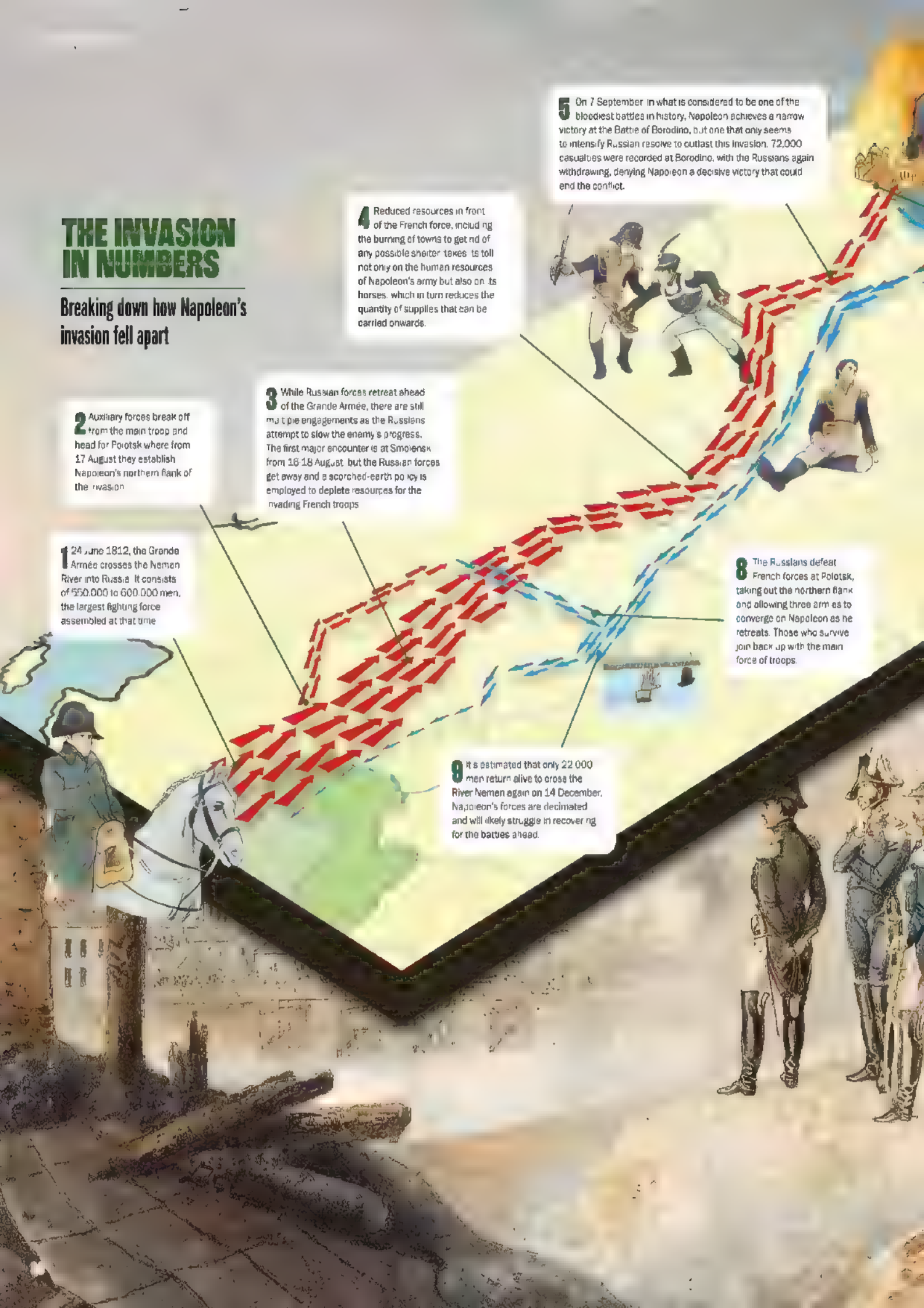
**4** Reduced resources in front of the French force, including the burning of towns to get rid of any possible shelter, takes its toll not only on the human resources of Napoleon's army but also on its horses, which in turn reduces the quantity of supplies that can be carried onwards.

**3** While Russian forces retreat ahead of the Grande Armée, there are still multiple engagements as the Russians attempt to slow the enemy's progress. The first major encounter is at Smolensk from 16-18 August, but the Russian forces get away and a scorched-earth policy is employed to deplete resources for the invading French troops.

**5** On 7 September, in what is considered to be one of the bloodiest battles in history, Napoleon achieves a narrow victory at the Battle of Borodino, but one that only seems to intensify Russian resolve to outlast this invasion. 72,000 casualties were recorded at Borodino, with the Russians again withdrawing, denying Napoleon a decisive victory that could end the conflict.

**8** The Russians defeat French forces at Polotsk, taking out the northern flank and allowing three armies to converge on Napoleon as he retreats. Those who survive join back up with the main force of troops.

**9** It is estimated that only 22,000 men return alive to cross the River Nemen again on 14 December. Napoleon's forces are decimated and will likely struggle in recovering for the battles ahead.







**6** One week after Borodino the Grande Armée enters Moscow to find it abandoned and no officials to surrender the city to the invading force. Even so, Napoleon remains there from 14 September to 19 October, but without assistance in billeting the troops, a free-for-all ensues. When fires begin to break out and spread around the city there are no means of putting them out.

**“HORSES, NOT SHOED FOR WINTER, COLLAPSED AND WERE SOON EATEN, WHILE WAGONS AND GUNS WERE ABANDONED”**

**7** Napoleon turns back with no prospect of the Russians surrendering. He is forced to travel along the same roads that he had entered Russia on, where supplies had already been depleted or destroyed. What's more, temperatures are now falling rapidly as winter takes hold.

Napoleon was consistently denied the gratification of a surrender by Russian forces, who just kept retreating deeper into the country, even at Moscow

well as the treasury and baggage wagons rumbled over the other. A gallant band of Swiss, Poles and exhausted Frenchmen kept the Russians away from the bridgehead on the western bank, while a corps of Poles and Germans protected the rear of the French army as it staggered across the bridges under Russian artillery fire. On the afternoon of 27 November, von Zech's Baden grenadiers were the last formed troops to cross over before, on the following morning, orders were given to burn the bridges, effectively trapping 20,000 stragglers on the eastern bank.

The French, turning their backs on this new tragedy, pressed on towards Vilnius, but they had not yet escaped with their lives, for the temperature now plummeted: the cold becoming savagely intense. Morale and discipline soon collapsed altogether. That, instead of self-preservation, in all its brutish selfishness, now came to the fore as thousands froze, starved or were cut down by pursuing Cossacks. Many participants described unfortunates being knocked to the ground, stripped, pillaged and left to die by their own comrades, while others simply marched past tens of thousands of men imploring help, begging for food or lying slumped and slowly freezing to death.

All eyes looked to Vilnius, but before it was reached, Napoleon took the momentous decision to quit his army. He would return to Paris to prepare for the next campaign and arrive before the bad news from the east. From Oszmiana [Ashmyany] he set off in a sledge escorted by freezing Neapolitans who, gnawed at by frostbite and cold, gave way at Vilnius to better adapted Poles. Meanwhile, command of the army passed to Joachim Murat, who proved unsuitable to rally an army in its final throes. That army again destroyed whatever food had been collected in Vilnius and soon abandoned the city, streaming out beyond it in the December snows and abandoning the treasury wagons and any remaining loot from Moscow as it did so.

As a few thousand soldiers reached the Nemėn, and some tens of thousands of stragglers staggered along in their wake, Murat abandoned the army too, leaving Prince Eugene in charge of the pitiful remains of what had once been the most powerful force in Europe. He led them into freezing fortresses along the Vistula and awaited Napoleon's return from the ministries and drawing rooms of Paris. Napoleon, having imposed another blood tax on France to fund a new army, was soon back in the fray, facing down the Russians as they spilled into Germany. But the Prussians soon switched sides, followed by Austria and several German states – and these new allies kept the upper hand until they reached the gaunt boulevards of Paris in April 1814. Napoleon's tired veterans and fresh cannon-fodder had tried to stop them, fighting bravely under the same old banners

**"THOUSANDS FROZE, STARVED  
OR WERE CUT DOWN BY  
PURSUING COSSACKS"**

The Russians abandoned Moscow and left it to the Grande Armée



With wooden buildings and few locals to assist, fires spread quickly through Moscow



The French had to fight hard to stop the Kremlin from burning or ammunition from exploding from the heat



## WITNESS TO WAR

First-hand accounts of  
the Russian invasion  
and the massive toll  
it took on those who  
bore witness to it

### The Battle of Borodino

Then [about 1pm] we received orders that we would attack the redoubt which was to our right. So we set off at a walking pace to the foot of the slope. And there our charge commenced. To the right the battery was to be attacked by the Westphalian cavalry, whilst our brigade was to strike the very centre of the position. But the heavy fire pouring from the battery so confused the Westphalians that they fell into complete chaos by the redoubt and then plunged into us as they fell back almost forcing us to withdraw downhill too. Without wasting any time, the Saxon general [Johann] Thielmann, who was in command of our brigade, rallied us despite the canister fire, led us across to the other side of the earthworks and, using the impetus of our horses, we broke over the top and became masters of the battery. The French infantry soon arrived in support, while we turned and in the greatest order moved against the central battery and in the blink of an eye this battery was covered in my soldiers. My regiment took over 300 prisoners and one cannon, which I handed over to Imperial headquarters. There were also four more guns but without horses and so these could not be moved. The moats were full of Russians, I wanted to protect the defenceless from death, but the enraged soldiers did not listen to their commander's voice, and hacked away, soaking their swords in the blood of the enemy. I myself pulled four frightened and barely conscious soldiers out of the ditches, took them prisoner and sent them to the rear with a corporal. I had two horses wounded under me, and my cuirass had three dents from the shot.

From the Memoirs of Colonel Stanisław  
Aleksander Matachowski, Polish Cuirassiers

### Crossing the Beresina

'We received the order to march for Studianka. Here, two bridges had almost been completed by bridging engineers under the command of General Eblé; these brave men were working in the freezing water. One of the bridges was for infantry, whilst the other was for cavalry and artillery. As we were about to cross the infantry bridge the Emperor came over towards us and barked a question at our colonel. 'How many men in your regiment?' The colonel, taken aback by the abrupt tone, hesitated. The Emperor made an impatient gesture and assumed an irritated expression. He turned to me, as I was just a few paces away, and asked me the same question. I replied, telling him so many officers, so many men, he didn't seem to me to be the same emperor I had seen in Paris; he looked tired and preoccupied. He was, however, still wearing the famous grey riding-coat. He galloped off passing down II Corps in its entirety. I followed him with my eyes, seeing him halt before the 1st Swiss Regiment, which was in our brigade. My friend, Captain Rey, was able to study the Emperor at more length and he too was struck by the Emperor's disquiet. He dismounted and leaned against some of the planks, intended for the bridge but stacked by the river. He lowered his head then looked up and impatiently spoke to General Eblé.

'It's taking too long general.'

'Sure, as you can see, my men are up to their necks in the water, the ice impairs their work and I have no food or brandy to revive them.'

'That will do,' said the Emperor. He again looked at the ground and then, a few moments later, began to grumble again having now seemingly forgotten the general's words. He knew what the enemy was doing and greatly feared being cut off, before the bridges being completed, by an enemy converging upon us from three different directions. I'm possibly not mistaken in thinking that this was one of the most difficult times in his entire life. Even so, he showed no emotion — merely impatience.

From the Memoirs of Louis Begos  
2nd Swiss Regiment

### The Burning of Moscow

Around midnight, I visited the outposts that I had established around the city. Arriving at the one just by the Stock Exchange, I noticed that there was a lot of dense smoke but couldn't see any flames. The officer in charge of the post said that he'd seen something similar happen earlier but as all the city gates were closed, he thought that it must be some fluke of nature and nothing to do with the army. Whilst we were talking we took a closer look at the source of the smoke and it was then that I saw a flash of flame. I ran back to the square and ordered 100 men to follow me, meanwhile placing the rest of the battalion under arms. Even though I'd only been away a matter of moments, when I got back I found that an entire house was now engulfed in flames and that the fire was spreading. I sent word to warn the marshal and he ordered that the pumps be found and that other precautions be taken to prevent the fire from taking hold. There wasn't much wind and we thought that the fire wouldn't make much progress. But we had our hands tied because we couldn't find any pumps and because the gates were locked, and we lacked the means to break them open. I immediately confirmed that the area that was on fire was relatively isolated and that only this part of the city would be affected. Only then did I manage to collect a few individuals and, together, we broke down a door and penetrated in to the area in which the fire had taken hold. It would have been very easy to put the fire out had we had the pumps. But one of the men who I had with me, speaking in Italian, said that there wasn't a pump in the entire city and that the governor had taken them away with him. He also told me that he thought the governor had given orders to burn the city and that this was to be done by men released from the prisons.

From the Memoirs of Louis Joseph  
Vionnet, Imperial Guard

## NOT WEATHER READY

How the Grande Armée  
was poorly kitted out  
for the job

### Summer clothing

The French army believed that it would secure a rapid victory in Russia, but one enemy it hadn't considered was the weather. The invasion only began in July, yet winter conditions were known to begin as early as September. When the cold weather descended the French rued their lack of cold-weather clothing.

### Illness

Hyperthermia swept through the troops, especially as they retreated from Moscow and struggled to find sufficient shelter. Gathering around camp fires for warmth was nowhere near sufficient anymore for survival.

### Provisions

Along with not having clothing that would withstand the falling temperatures, the French forces also lacked enough means to carry supplies with them in the face of the scorched-earth tactics being employed by the Russians. This had a cumulative effect too, as what horses they had for ferrying supplies began to die from the cold and lack of food.

### Opening struggles

It's estimated that Napoleon lost around a third of his fighting force in the opening weeks of the invasion before any of the major battles had been fought. Some of this was due to minor skirmishes with Russian troops, some desertions, but also deadly diseases like diphtheria, typhus and dysentery.



of the Grande Armée, but the calibre of his new army could not match the one lost in Russia.

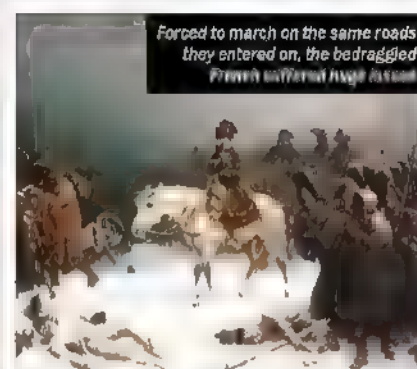
Indeed, that army of half a million men had been completely destroyed, the majority perishing in the fields or disappearing beneath the snow and ice. That January of 1813, Prince Eugene was able to gather some 30,000 survivors capable of continuing the campaign. These, as well as the Austrian and Prussian contingents that had largely escaped unscathed on the flanks, were practically all that remained of the mighty host that had crossed the Niemen and the troops subsequently despatched as reinforcements. Of course many thousands had deserted and made the way quietly back to their homelands, but even so, the vast majority had perished or fallen into the hands of the Russians.

The four largest army corps combined numbered just 6,400 infantry in February 1813. The Old Guard could field just 1,440 men, but only 500 of those were capable of fighting. Individual regiments had ceased to exist. The 6th Voltigeurs and 6th Tirailleurs of the Young Guard were reported as having no survivors in February 1813 or were so reduced as to be disregarded as units. The 4th Line Regiment had 102 survivors out of the 2,300 men that had marched into Russia, while the 53rd Line reported just 52. The cavalry was hit just as badly. The 11th Hussars

had 65 officers and men present in early 1813, while Saxony's elite Guard du Corps numbered just 26. Napoleon's allies and vassals had suffered tremendously too. The contingent from the Kingdom of Italy had departed with 27,400 men, 9,000 horses, 58 guns, 390 caissons and 700 wagons. By mid-December it mustered 796 frozen officers and men, and fewer re-crossed the Niemen. Although a small number of stragglers and sick later rejoined, it is estimated that Napoleon lost nearly 450,000 men during the campaign. Paradoxically, most of these died of disease or neglect on the march to Moscow and not in the retreat from it.

The Russians, too, had suffered enormous losses. Some 250,000 regular troops had died or gone missing, and tens of thousands were crippled or maimed. Losses among the Russian population have never been calculated but were certainly considerable. Moscow and Smolensk had been razed. Tens of thousands must have starved to death and thousands more returned from sheltering in the forests only to find their homes were now smoldering ruins. And their suffering would not finish there, for one more ordeal awaited them. As the winter of 1812 turned to the spring of 1813, a typhus epidemic took hold and Napoleon's invasion of Russia began to claim its final swathe of victims.

**"IT IS ESTIMATED THAT NAPOLEON LOST NEARLY 450,000 MEN DURING THE CAMPAIGN"**



Forced to march on the same roads they entered on, the bedraggled French suffered huge losses



Desertion and capture were frequent as Napoleon retreated



Temperatures dropped down as low as -30°C as the French tried to get out of Russia

# THE LIGHT BRIGADE'S RIDE





# TO DEATH OR GLORY

WORDS NICK SOLDINGER



**J**ust after 11 a.m. on 25 October 1854, at what was to become known as the Battle of Balaklava, Orderly Bugler William 'Bily' Brittain put his bugle to his lips. Responding in the blue uniform of the 17th Lancers, complete with its distinctive flat-topped czapka cap bearing the regimental badge – a death's head with the motto 'Or Glory' – he sounded the order to advance. The badge's sentiment was to prove hauntingly prophetic as the chirpy notes he now sounded from his bugle were about to send over 600 cavalrymen from Britain's elite Light Brigade galloping to their doom.

It wasn't that Bily Brittain was to blame for one of the greatest military blunders of all time. After all, like the rest of the men who took part in what became the famed Charge of the Light Brigade, he was merely following orders. "Trumpeter, walk... march!" His commanding officer, Lord Cardigan, had barked at him moments before. But he, too, was just obeying orders. So who was responsible for the disastrous charge? And what were men such as Bily doing on a remote Russian plain risking life and limb for the British imperial cause in the first place?

Step forward Russia's ambitious monarch Nicholas I. By the mid-19th century, Turkey's Ottoman Empire was in decline and the Tsar saw an opportunity to expand his borders westward. Capture Constantinople, he figured, and Russia's warships would have access to the Mediterranean, allowing his country unprecedented influence over foreign trade routes. It was clearly something the men who ran Victoria's wave-ruling empire were never going to allow. The Tsar, though, was not going to be easily deterred.

In July 1853, a religious row between France, Turkey and Russia over the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem escalated into a full-blown war when Tsar Nicholas used the diplomatic dispute as an excuse to invade Ottoman lands. Britain watched the war with interest. When Turkey started to lose, Victoria's government issued an ultimatum for Russia to withdraw. When the bullish Tsar ignored it, Britain's imperial propaganda machine went into overdrive. With its press fanning the flames, war fever gripped the nation.

By spring the following year, flag-waving crowds cheered Britain's hastily assembled 28,000-strong expeditionary force onto a flotilla of gunships and waved them off over the horizon. The Russian

Bear, many a British citizen believed with all their pumped-up heart, was going to get the thrashing it thoroughly deserved.

By August, British troops were in Varna in Turkish-held Bulgaria, where they were met by 30,000 troops from France, who had joined Britain's crusade. Here they were also met by news that the Tsar – alarmed by reports that Austrian troops were massing on Russia's western border – had actually withdrawn his troops from Turkish-held territory. There was now no need for further conflict, but the drums of war were banging too loudly for anyone to hear sense.

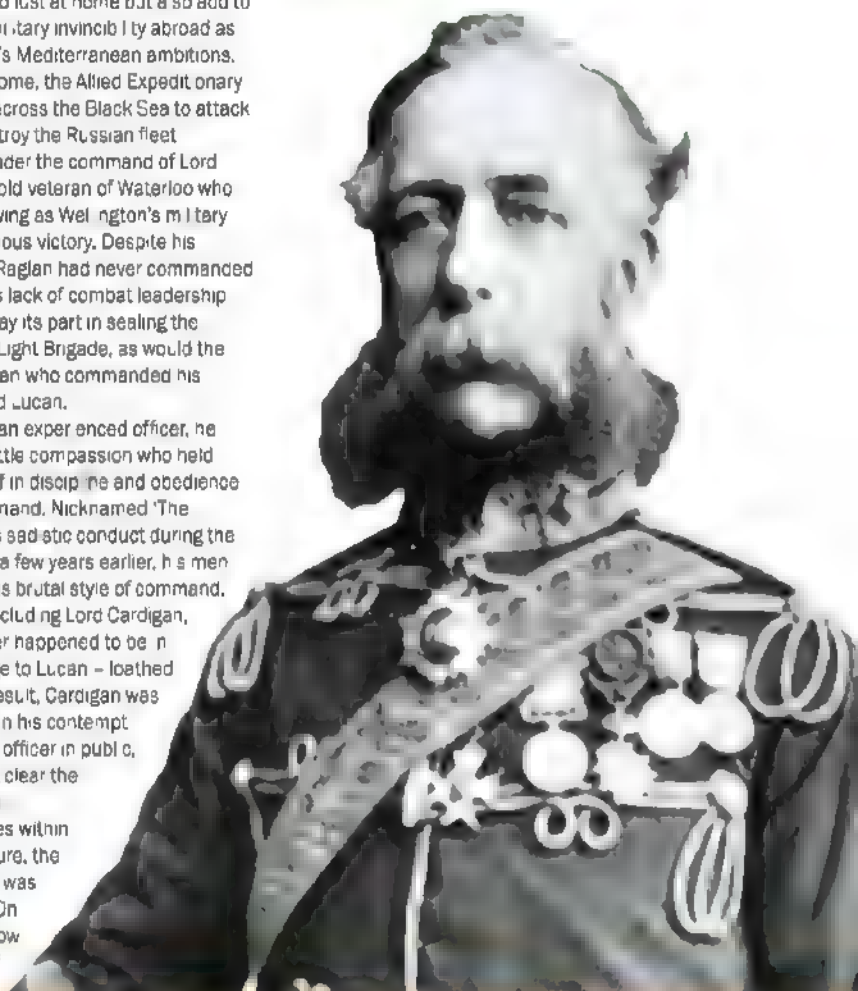
A swift, decisive blow, London decided, would not only satisfy blood lust at home but also add to the aura of British military invincibility abroad as well as end the Tsar's Mediterranean ambitions. Instead of coming home, the Allied Expeditionary Force was ordered across the Black Sea to attack Sevastopol and destroy the Russian fleet.

The Allies were under the command of Lord Raglan – a 66-year-old veteran of Waterloo who had lost an arm serving as Wellington's military secretary at the famous victory. Despite his pedigree, however, Raglan had never commanded troops in battle. This lack of combat leadership experience would play its part in sealing the fate of the doomed Light Brigade, as would the personality of the man who commanded his cavalry division: Lord Lucan.

While Lucan was an experienced officer, he was also a man of little compassion who held an unwavering belief in discipline and obedience to the chain of command. Nicknamed 'The Exterminator' for his sadistic conduct during the Irish Potato Famine a few years earlier, his men despised him and his brutal style of command. Lucan's officers – including Lord Cardigan, whose younger sister happened to be in an unhappy marriage to Lucan – loathed their general. As a result, Cardigan was barely able to contain his contempt for his commanding officer in public, while Lucan made it clear the feelings were mutual.

Despite difficulties within its command structure, the Expeditionary Force was initially successful. On 14 September, by now joined by an army of

**"NICKNAMED 'THE EXTERMINATOR' FOR HIS SADISTIC CONDUCT DURING THE IRISH POTATO FAMINE A FEW YEARS EARLIER, HIS MEN DESPISED HIM AND HIS BRUTAL STYLE OF COMMAND"**



Above, Lord Cardigan, who led the Light Brigade's infamous charge during the Battle of Balaklava, came home to a hero's welcome

The 93rd Highlanders were lionised by the British press for their bravery and actions at Balaklava





# THE CHARGE AS IT HAPPENED

How 30 minutes of history helped shape the mythology of the mighty British Empire



**11 A.M.**

## LORD CARDIGAN GIVES THE ORDER TO ADVANCE

Despite realising that he is leading his men into certain peril, the Light Brigade's commander tells his bugler to sound the advance. "Here goes the last of the Brudenells," he is heard to murmur to himself shortly before. Brudenell was his family name and he was the last male in its bloodline.

**11.02 A.M.**

## CAPTAIN NOLAN IS THE FIRST CASUALTY

Minutes into the charge, the man who delivered the fateful order, Captain Lewis Nolan, is killed instantly by a shrapnel wound to his chest. It's thought that, having finally realised his misconstrued message would have tragic results, he raced to the front of the Brigade to try to redirect the charge.

**11.08 A.M.**

## CARDIGAN'S MEN REACH THE RUSSIAN LINES

After a full six minutes of riding through an intense artillery barrage, around 150 men of the Light Brigade finally reach the Russian line and, after intense hand-to-hand combat with the infantry and artillery men there, break through it. Miraculously, their leader, Lord Cardigan, survives the entire charge unscathed.

**11.09 A.M.**

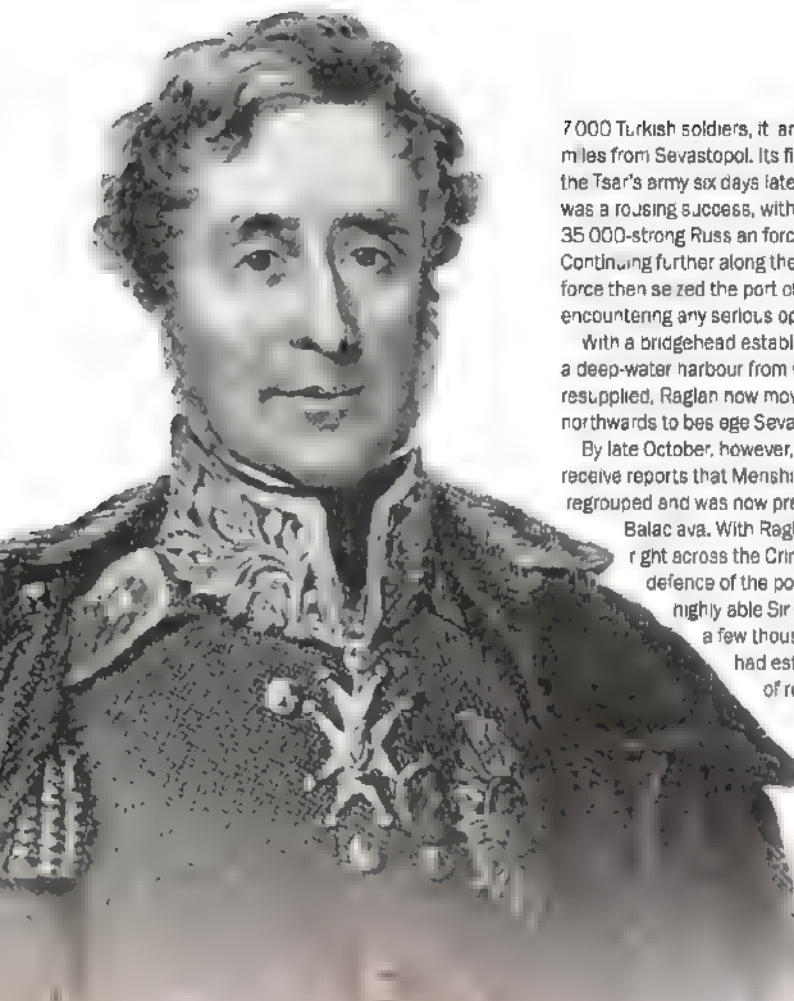
## THE BRIGADE ENCOUNTERS MENSHIKOV'S CAVALRY

Behind the Russian guns, however, are around 2,000 Russian cavalrymen. Having rushed through the gun positions, the Light Brigade now plunges into their massed ranks. They are hopelessly outnumbered and, after a brief but ferocious skirmish, those still alive are able to begin to withdraw.

**11.30 A.M.**

## THE LAST SURVIVORS ARRIVE BACK AT BRITISH LINES

Half an hour after it started, the survivors hobble back to the British line at the western end of the valley. The casualties are thought to be 110 killed and 160 wounded, with the loss of around 375 horses. Although not wiped out, the Light Brigade is effectively rendered inoperable for the rest of the campaign.



As overall commander the one-armed veteran of Waterloo, Lord Raglan, was ultimately held responsible for the deadly debacle at Balaclava

7 000 Turkish soldiers, it ended unopposed 15 miles from Sevastopol. Its first engagement with the Tsar's army six days later at the Battle of Alma was a rousing success, with General Menshikov's 35 000-strong Russian force quickly routed. Continuing further along the coast, the allied force then seized the port of Balaclava without encountering any serious opposition.

With a bridgehead established, complete with a deep-water harbour from which it could be resupplied, Raglan now moved the bulk of his force northwards to besiege Sevastopol.

By late October, however, Raglan began to receive reports that Menshikov's routed army had regrouped and was now preparing an attack on Balaclava. With Raglan's forces stretched right across the Crimean Peninsula the defence of the port was left to the highly able Sir Colin Campbell and a few thousand men. Campbell had established a string of redoubts along the Causeway Heights to the north of Balaclava. These defensive

positions were intended to keep watch over the position and the valley approaches that fed into it and were mostly manned by Turkish artillery. To the east of the port he placed 1,200 Royal Marines with 26 guns, while entrance to the gorge was protected by the 93rd Highlanders and W Battery of the Royal Artillery. Meanwhile, Lucan's cavalry division – made up of both the Light and Heavy Brigades – was around a mile to the north of Balaclava. With the nearest reinforcements at least a two-hour march away to the north, the redoubts on the Causeway Heights were tactically vital for the defence of Balaclava, and Campbell knew it. Unfortunately, so did the Russians.

On 25 October, General Menshikov unleashed a force of 25 battalions and 78 guns to seize the redoubts. Attacking at dawn, the Russians soon overran the positions there and by 8 a.m. controlled a six strongholds along the heights.

After surveying the battlefield from the Sapouné Heights to the north, Raglan sent orders for reinforcements to urgently march south to support the defence of Balaclava. He also ordered Lucan to withdraw his cavalry to protect them from artillery fire, leaving just the 550 men of the 93rd Highlanders, and a single artillery battery

**“AGAINST ALL THE ODDS, THE BRITISH HAD WON A SECOND UNLIKELY VICTORY IN THE EVOLVING BATTLE OF BALACLAVA – BUT THEIR LUCK WAS ABOUT TO RUN OUT”**





between the Russians and their allies' vital supply link at Balaclava. Within minutes, around 400 Russian Hussars were galloping straight towards the Highlanders. Abandoning the square formation tactic typically employed by the British army at that time, Campbell organised his troops into two ranks, the soon-to-be famous Thin Red Line. The Russians charged the Highlanders, but incredibly the line stood and the Hussars were sent galloping back in full retreat, harassed by artillery as they ran.

Raglan was as surprised as anyone by the unlikely rout. Expecting the Highlanders to be overrun, he'd ordered Lucan to dispatch eight squadrons from his Heavy Brigade in support. These now ran into the remainder of the Russian cavalry – some 2,000 men. Despite being outnumbered five to one, the Heavy Brigade charged the Russians and miraculously routed them. Against all the odds, the British had won a second unlikely victory in the evolving Battle of Balaclava – but the luck was about to run out.

What remained of the Russian cavalry withdrew to the far end of the North Valley – a mile or so to the east – where they joined an eight-gun-strong field battery. In close proximity, on both sides of the valley, were another 22 Russian guns – meaning more than 30 artillery pieces zeroed in on the valley's narrow corridor. It was a death trap, which Raglan could quite clearly see from his position atop the Sapouné Heights to the north. Also within his sights were Russian troops wheeling captured Turkish artillery pieces down from the redoubts and back to the town lines.

It was now 10 a.m. and Raglan, believing the redoubts were being abandoned, sent an order to Lucan to quickly explore the possibility of retaking them. His ambiguous order read, "Cavalry to advance and take advantage of any opportunity to recover the Heights. They will be supported by infantry which have been ordered. Advance on two fronts." The infantry Raglan spoke of were the reinforcements he'd earlier called for who were still marching south and nowhere to be seen. Lucan, assuming he had to wait for them, stayed put.

Half an hour passed before an irate Raglan sent yet another misleading order. This one read, "Lord Raglan wishes the cavalry to advance rapidly to the front, follow the enemy, and try to prevent the enemy carrying away the guns. Troop of horse artillery may accompany. French cavalry is on your left. Immediate." It was to prove a fatal choice of words, as the man sent to deliver the message – the notoriously hot-headed Captain Nolan – would also play his role in the unfolding tragedy. "Tell Lord Lucan the cavalry is to attack immediately!" Raglan shouted after Nolan as he galloped away. Upon Nolan's delivery of Raglan's missive a confused Lucan looked about the battlefield and asked, "Attack, sir? Attack what? What guns sir?" Because of the corrugated terrain he could see

## BLUNDERED ORDERS

How miscommunication, hot-headedness and personal grievance all played a part in the disaster

### LORD RAGLAN

#### ORDER:

In a hastily scribbled note Lord Raglan writes, "Cavalry to advance rapidly to the front follow the enemy, and try to prevent the enemy carrying away the guns."



### CAPTAIN NOLAN

#### ORDER:

"Tell Lord Lucan the cavalry is to attack immediately!" Lord Raglan shouts after an overexcited Nolan, before pointing vaguely at the Russian position at the far end of the north valley.



### LORD LUCAN

#### ORDER:

Nolan passes on the order to Lord Lucan, who instructs Lord Cardigan to lead the attack. "What choice have we?" he shrugs when the latter points out the suicidal order.



the Russian position at the end of the valley but not the Russian troops making off with captured artillery pieces from the redoubts. A highly excited Nolan then reportedly made a sweeping gesture towards the far end of the valley and shouted, "There my Lord is your enemy. There are your guns!" before reiterating Raglan's wishes that the attack should take place immediately.

So Lucan complied, ordering his hated brother-in-law's Light Brigade to take point. When Lord Cardigan, not unreasonably, questioned the sanity of the order, Lucan merely replied that those were the orders he'd been given, adding: "What choice have we?" The Light Brigade's fate was sealed. Before giving Billy Brittain the order to sound the advance Cardigan was heard to murmur, "We'll here go the last of the Brudenells," a reference to his family name and the fact he clearly didn't expect to survive the morning.

The three lines of the Light Brigade began to ride slowly down into the valley. Behind them followed the Heavy Brigade on the larger horses

**"RUSSIAN GUNS ON THREE SIDES NOW RAINED FIRE DOWN ON THE ADVANCING BRITISH CAVALRY, WHILE THE ALLIED COMMANDERS ON THE HEIGHTS STARED ON IN DISBELIEF AT THE SPECTACULAR BUT SUICIDAL DRAMA BEING PLAYED OUT IN FRONT OF THEM"**

On his return home Lord Cardigan gave highly exaggerated accounts of his part in the battle

The Charge of the Light Brigade still continues to inspire film, literature and music across the world

War artist William Simpson's official painting of the Charge was vetted by Cardigan to show him clearly leading the ranks





**"THESE DANDYISH VICTORIAN WARRIORS,  
IDEOLOGICALLY HARD-WIRED FOR DEATH OR  
GLORY, RODE INTO BRITISH IMPERIAL MYTHOLOGY  
PUMPED ON PATRIOTISM AND ADRENALINE"**



William Howard Russell, a reporter with *The Times* and the world's first modern war correspondent, watched on with a mix of wonder and horror: "They swept proudly past," he wrote, "glittering in the morning sun in all the pride and splendour of war. We could hardly believe the evidence of our senses! Surely that handful of men were not going to charge an army in position? Alas! It was but too true – the desperate valour knew no bounds, and far indeed was it removed from its so-called better part – discretion."

As the Light Brigade's trot broke into an all-out gallop, an agitated Captain Nolan suddenly broke ranks and raced to the front of the advance shouting at Lord Cardigan. Many have since speculated that, having finally realised the direction the charge was taking was wrong, he was trying to avert catastrophe.

Whatever he was shouting, however, was lost in the din of horses' hooves and the opening salvos from the Russian guns, and whatever his intentions were followed him to the grave. Moments later a shell burst directly above him, shrapnel puncturing his chest. No longer, the first of the Light Brigade's casualties that morning.

Russian guns on three sides now rained fire down on the advancing British cavalry, while the allied commanders on the heights stared on in disbelief at the spectacular but suicidal drama being played out in front of them. One astonished French commander, General Bosquet, was heard

*The actions at Balaclava greatly increased the reputation of British cavalry across Europe and the world. The same cannot be said for the British commanders*



to comment, "C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre; c'est de la folie." It's magnificent, but it is not war; it's madness.

Indeed, madness it was. A full-frontal cavalry assault against a fixed artillery position by what was a light, fast-moving reconnaissance unit ran contrary to every military practice. Yet these dandyish Victorian warriors, ideologically hardwired for death or glory, rode into British imperial mythology pumped on patriotism and adrenaline. Raglan's aide-de-camp Lieutenant Colonel Cathorpe, described the unfolding disaster in a letter shortly afterwards:

"The pace of our cavalry increased every moment, until they went thundering along the valley, making the ground tremble beneath them. The awful slaughter that was going on – from the fire the enemy poured into them, apparently did not check their career. On they went, headlong towards their death, disregarding aught but the object of their attack."

Such was the speed of the Light Brigade's advance that a significant gap opened up between it and the chasing Heavy Brigade. Armed with swords designed to hack and

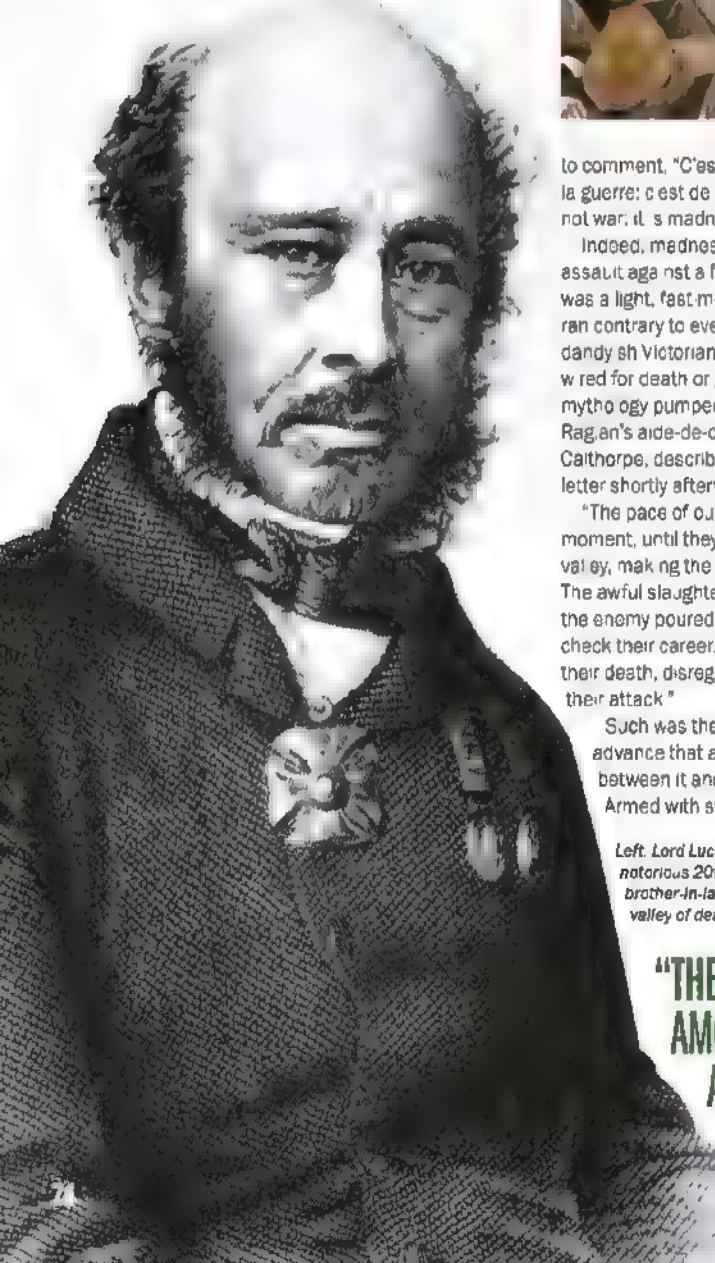
slab in close-quarters combat – rather than the slashing sabres and piercing lances the Light Brigade carried – the Heavies, with their bigger horses, were the tanks of the Victorian battlefield. Trained and equipped to smash into enemy positions and break them, they might have topped the balance in the fighting that was to follow. But as the Light Brigade disappeared into the distance amid dust and cannon smoke, Lucan pulled them up and allowed his despondent brother-in-law's men to continue into the jaws of death. "They have sacrificed the Light Brigade, they shall not have the Heavy if I can help it!" he is reported to have said.

By now the Light Brigade, despite horrific casualties, was nearing the Russian line. Miraculously, still riding among its ranks was lancer Billy Britton, whose bugle had started the whole fiasco, as well as men like Hussar Albert Mitchell, who would afterwards recall the intensity of the charge. "As we drew near, the guns in our front supplied us liberally with grape and canister which brought down men and horses in heaps. Up to this time I was going on a right but missed my left-hand man from my side and thinking I might soon be my turn offered up a small prayer, 'Oh Lord protect me and watch over my poor mother.'"

With the air thick with grapeshot, smoke and the screams of the dying, the Light Brigade was just 100 yards from the Russian guns when a final

*Left: Lord Lucan – great, great grandfather of his notorious 20th-century namesake – sent his brother-in-law Cardigan ahead of him into the valley of death*

**"THEN WE WERE ON IT, HALF A DOZEN OF US LEAPT IN AMONG THE GUNS AT ONCE AND I, WITH ONE BLOW OF MY AXE, BRAINED A RUSSIAN GUNNER..."**





volley of grapeshot smashed into its ranks. Only 150 men on horseback had reached the Russian line and now they began to inflict a violent but brief revenge. One man who made it the length of the charge without injury was the 17th Lancers' regimental butcher John Fahy. The night before he'd been arrested for being drunk and that morning had appeared late on parade still dressed in his butcher's apron, which he now wore as his horse galloped towards destiny. He was armed not with a lance but a meat cleaver from his field kitchen. "Nearer and nearer we came to the dreadful battery," he revealed some time later, "which kept vomiting death on us like a volcano 'til I seemed to feel on my cheek the hot air from the cannon's mouth. Then we were on it, half a dozen of us leapt on among the guns at once and I, with one blow of my axe, brained a Russian gunner..."

But the fray would not last long. Having smashed through the Russian guns at the far end of the valley, they were confronted by the massed ranks of Russian cavalry. The Light Brigade charged once more but was soon forced to retreat.

Among the British observers watching the entire debacle was Fanny Duberry, the wife of a Light

**"OF THE 673 MEN (ALTHOUGH THE NUMBER IS DISPUTED) WHO HAD CHARGED THAT MORNING, ONLY 195 WERE LEFT MOUNTED AFTERWARDS. THE RECRIMINATIONS BEGAN ALMOST IMMEDIATELY"**

Brigade officer who later wrote a controversial book detailing what she had witnessed. As the cloud of gun smoke and disturbed Crimean dust began to settle, she described a pathetic scene: "Presently come a few horsemen straggling, galloping back. What can those skirmishers be doing? Good God! It's the Light Brigade!"

Of the 673 men (although the number is disputed) who had charged that morning, only 195 were left mounted after the battle. The recriminations began almost immediately. Cardigan, who'd miraculously survived the charge, was in tally reprimanded by a furious Raglan until Cardigan pointed out that he was, after all, just following orders. "My Lord," Cardigan reportedly said, "I hope you will not blame me, for I received the order to attack from my superior officer in front of the troops." When Raglan's anger cooled

he had to admit that Cardigan wasn't to blame. He'd "acted throughout," he later wrote in a letter, typical of many comments on Cardigan's part in the disaster, "with the greatest steadiness and gallantry." With Lucan, however, Raglan wasn't so forgiving. Soon after his conversation with Cardigan, who'd not surprisingly blamed his brother-in-law, Raglan told Lucan bluntly, "You have lost the Light Brigade."

It was an accusation Lucan vehemently denied and continued to do so for the rest of his life. The dead Nolan – who, of course, couldn't defend himself – was also held up as culpable by both Lucan and Raglan as they squirmed to shift blame from themselves.

Official reports of the battle sent home focused on the valor of the Light Brigade, while the evident incompetence was swiftly glossed over.

## BALACLAVA'S CAVALRY CARNAGE

The Light Brigade's charge is the most famous, yet it was the least successful of three made during the battle.

Of the three charges made by the allies during the Battle of Balaklava, the one undertaken by the Light Brigade was by far the least successful. Two hours previous, eight squadrons of the British Heavy Brigade under the command of the highly capable Colonel James Scarlett had run into the main force of the Russian cavalry in the chaos of battle. Despite being significantly outnumbered – Scarlett's force is thought to have consisted of between 300–400 men while the Russian force was more than 2,000 strong – the Heavies ploughed into the Russian flank. Eight minutes of hacking and slashing followed at close quarters until the

Russians turned and fled back to the safety of their own lines. One French general said afterwards, witnessing the action, "It was truly magnificent, and to me who could see the whole valley filled with Russian cavalry, the victory of the Heavy Brigade was the most glorious thing I ever saw!"

Before the day was out the French cavalry would also prove their worth. During the Light Brigade survivors' shamolic retreat back down the North Valley, they were again torn into by the Russian guns on the hillsides. It is highly likely they would have all been wiped out had it not been for the French cavalry regiment the Chasseurs d'Afrique. On seeing an opportunity to help the Light Brigade, they stormed the hillsides on the Brigade's left flank, attacking the Russian positions there and helping to bring an end to the suffering in the valley below.

Left: Soldiers of the French Regiment the Chasseurs d'Afrique relax after having attacked Russian guns pounding the Light Brigade's left flank.

Colonel Scarlett led his Heavy Brigade in a charge against a vastly superior Russian force, routing it in eight minutes.

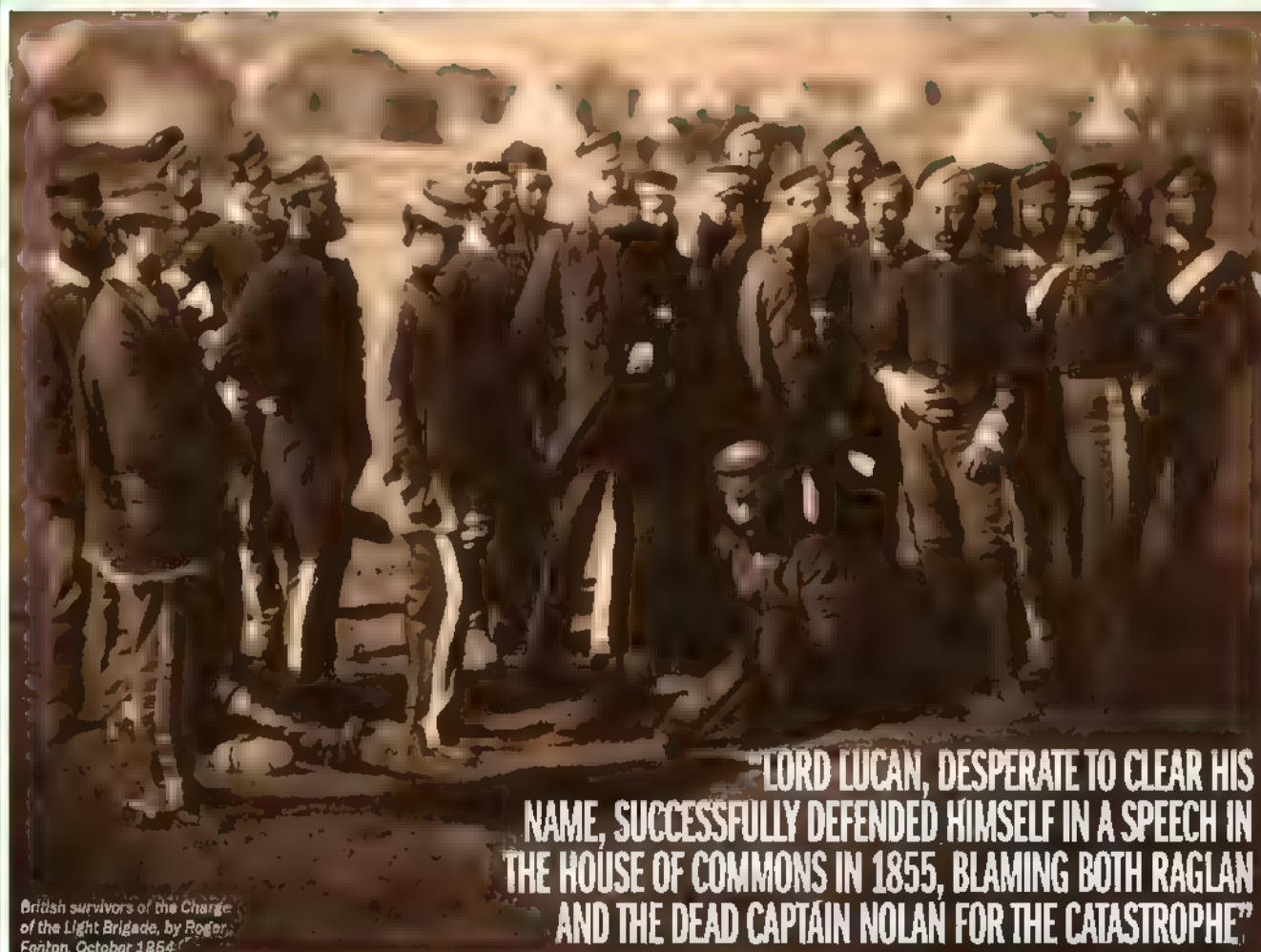


# SURVIVORS OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

Almost as soon as the cannon smoke lifted, legends and lies began to swirl

The Light Brigade suffered 40 per cent casualty rates and as a result saw limited action throughout the rest of the Crimean campaign, which ended in February 1856. Almost immediately public spats broke out among the aristocratic antagonists who had played key roles in the debacle. Lord Lucan, desperate to clear his name, successfully defended himself in a speech in the House of Commons in 1855, blaming both Raglan and the dead Captain Nolan for the catastrophe. His tactic appears to have worked as he was subsequently promoted. Cardigan, who also returned to Britain in 1855, was given a hero's welcome, although he later found his apparently daring role in the battle – something which he'd made a good deal of – come under scrutiny by the press.

As for the ordinary men who'd fought and survived that day, they, for the most part, have shuffled off into the shadows of history. Not that there wasn't enthusiastic public support for them at the time. In fact, a Light Brigade Relief Fund – a sort of Victorian Help for Heroes – was quickly set up. This was funded by public donation as well as a number of entrepreneurial enterprises. One example was a recording of Billy Brittain's bugle order as remembered by Light Brigade veteran Martin Lanfrie in 1890. The apparently opportunistic Lanfrie billed himself as the man who'd sounded the fateful order to charge that day, and for years he seems to have enjoyed a measure of celebrity as a result of this lie.



British survivors of the Charge of the Light Brigade, by Roger Fenton, October 1854

**"LORD LUCAN, DESPERATE TO CLEAR HIS NAME, SUCCESSFULLY DEFENDED HIMSELF IN A SPEECH IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS IN 1855, BLAMING BOTH RAGLAN AND THE DEAD CAPTAIN NOLAN FOR THE CATASTROPHE"**

Images: Alamy, Chris Collingwood (www.collingwoodhistoricalart.com)

Poets, painters and the press all rushed to turn disaster into glory. Within weeks, Queen Victoria's poet laureate, Alfred Lord Tennyson, had immortalised the action in his most famous verse, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, which spoke with rousing patriotism of the "noble 600" who'd ridden "into the Valley of Death", signing it off with a call for the world to honour their glorious sacrifice.

While Tennyson was scribbling his poem back in Britain, painter William Simpson arrived in the Crimea as official war artist for the British Government. Having not witnessed the events he was reliant upon those who had for a steer on how it should be officially recorded. Lord Cardigan was the most forthcoming and, after three attempts,

finally signed off on Simpson's interpretation of what had happened. "The truth was," Simpson admitted later, "that in the last sketch I had taken greater care than in the first two to make his lordship conspicuous in the front of the brigade."

Simpson's vetted watercolours received the same privileged treatment as Raglan's own despatches from the front and were sent home on the first available ship. Although there was no censorship per se, journalist William Howard Russell's reports and soldiers' letters were delayed in Batavia to ensure the official version of events got home first. Imperial Britain's PR machine was clearly working hard to turn a military calamity into a story of mythic stoicism – something it largely

succeeded in doing. The legendary Charge of the Light Brigade is still remembered by many not for the ineptitude that caused it but rather by the courageous sacrifice of the men who died undertaking a senseless action in a war that could have been avoided in the first place.

So what of Billy Brittain, whose bugle call had sparked the mythic Charge in the first place? Despite the patriotic-sounding name, Brittain was actually from Ireland – a land recently ravaged by famine – and like many of his countrymen he may well have joined the ranks of the British army as a means of staying alive. Badly wounded, Brittain was taken to a field hospital at Scutari, where he sadly died of his wounds on 14 February 1855.



# UNCOVER THE HORRORS OF THE BLOODIEST THEATRE IN THE HISTORY OF WARFARE

The battle for supremacy on the Eastern Front of WWII was arguably the most brutal conflict in human history, an existential struggle without mercy. From Stalingrad to Berlin, this is the story of a fight that would reshape the world



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# THE WORLD AT WAR

## 80 THE BATTLE OF TANNENBERG

The loss of almost 80,000 men in the fields of Prussia drove one Russian commander to suicide. Sending for a code book could have changed everything.

## 84 GALLIPOLI

Desperate to break the deadlock on the Western Front, Britain and her ANZAC allies lunged at the 'soft underbelly' of the Ottoman Empire. They would collide with a rock-solid defensive system that would claim thousands of lives.

## 96 DUNKIRK

Chased to the Channel by a relentless Wehrmacht, the BEF faced total obliteration in the summer of 1940. And then a fleet of 'little boats' performed a miraculous rescue mission.

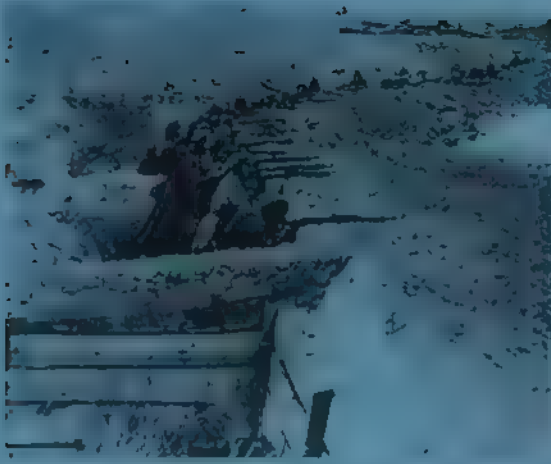
## 108 THE FALL OF SINGAPORE

Equipped with supposedly impregnable fortifications, the British assumed they could easily fend off any Japanese assaults. Within a few months they would be surrendering the island to the Empire of the Rising Sun.

## 120 OPERATION MARKET GARDEN

Abysmal planning and no small amount of incompetence plagued this crucial raid from the very start.





# ANNIHILATION IN THE EAST

EAST PRUSSIA 23-30 AUGUST 1914

How the spectacular incompetence of a few Russian officers led to the greatest German victory of the Great War and resulted in the deaths of thousands

WORDS JOEL MCIVER

**T**oday's warfare is driven by such advanced technology, including the world's fastest computers and even artificial intelligence, that it's hard to believe that a lack of basic assets caused the deaths of many thousands of soldiers at the infamous Battle of Tannenberg. As you read these words, this mismanaged conflict took place only 109 years ago – between 23 and 30 August 1914 – and yet 78,000 Russians lost their lives, at least partly because their leaders lacked one thing: a simple code book.

A rain of fire: German soldiers in action against the Russian army during the Battle of Tannenberg, in which the entire Second Army was virtually annihilated





World War – or the Great War, as it was known until 1939, and simply the European War in 1914 – had been declared less than a month before the Russian and German armies met near the town of Allenstein in East Prussia, now a part of Poland.

The Second German Reich of Kaiser Wilhelm II and its chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg (a vocal advocate for going to war in the summer of 1914), was keenly aware that it faced enemies to its east and west in the form of Russia, Britain and France, an alliance known as the Triple Entente. Rapid, decisive action would be required if Germany was to secure victory.

Germany's early efforts were based on the Schlieffen Plan, the idea that an offensive move through Belgium and France would focus first on its western front. If those countries' allies, the British, could be held at bay, the Kaiser's forces could expand to the east, entering Russia through East Prussia. The task of those eastern troops was to hold the line against the Russians until reinforcements could be transferred from the west, travelling across the whole of Germany to join the battle against the Tsar's forces.

Although the German High Command took a gamble, deploying a full 90 per cent of its forces – 1,191 battalions – to the west, and sending the



Paul von Rennenkampf, the commander of the First Russian Army, had overwhelmed the German Eighth Army at Insterburg and Gumbinnen but was soundly defeated at Tannenberg.

remainder to East Prussia to face the Russians, the move appeared to pay off. The French were soon overwhelmed, leaving Germany in control of key industrial assets in France.

It was time for the German Eighth Army to turn its attention towards East Prussia, and they made fast progress across the country by train. Their commander, General Maximilian von Prittwitz, knew that Russia would waste no time in travelling to meet them, as Moscow had long promised its French allies that it would immediately come to their aid in the event of German hostilities. Most of Russia's railway lines were still single-tracked in 1914, and its roads near



Russian prisoners of war wait for their fate to be decided after the Battle of Tannenberg ends on 30 August 1914. These were brave soldiers let down by the errors of their commanding officers.

The tension mounts: the view of an advance post of German trenches near Allenstein in East Prussia



## "INSTEAD OF REQUESTING A NEW CODE BOOK, SAMSONOV MADE THE UNFATHOMABLE DECISION TO SEND UNCODED MESSAGES, THUS INFORMING THE GERMANS OF HIS ARMY'S EVERY MOVE"

the East Prussian border were left undeveloped as a defence stragem; this slowed the Russian troops' advance, but nonetheless, they arrived at the border well before Germany expected them.

The Russian forces led by General Yakov Zhilinsky, comprised the First and Second Armies, the former led by General Paul von Rennenkampf and the latter commanded by General Alexander Samsonov. Their progress was difficult; along with their transport problems, the Russian forces consisted of large numbers of resource-depleting cavalry and Cossacks, all of whom had to deal with searing midsummer heat. They also lacked sufficient supplies of telephone cable, limiting their abilities severely. However, most damaging of all was the fact that Samsonov didn't have a copy of the code book that deciphered their communications. However, instead of requesting a new copy of von Rennenkampf's code book, he made the unfathomable decision to send uncoded radio messages, thus informing the Germans of his army's every move.

A preliminary battle took place on 20 August in which a German division led by General Hermann von François attacked the Russian XX Corps under cover of darkness. The Russians retaliated with heavy artillery and the German infantry was forced to retreat. Prittwitz relayed the news to Field Marshal Kuno von Moltke at OHL – the Oberste Heeresleitung, or Supreme Headquarters – and in

a panic, explained that he had intelligence that the Russians were making ground. Enraged, Moltke replaced Prittwitz and his chief of staff, Alfred von Waldersee, with the experienced Colonel General Paul von Hindenburg and Major General Erich Ludendorff.

The following day Samsonov's Second Army crossed the border into Germany and overran several border towns. Yet despite this progress the Russians were suffering from supply problems, staff incompetence and poor communications, and Samsonov lost control of all but two corps.

When Hindenburg arrived on 23 August he was determined to rout the Russians, firstly Samsonov's ineffective Second Army and then von Rennenkampf's more formidable First Army. "We had not merely to win a victory over Samsonov. We had to annihilate him," he later wrote. "Only thus could we get a free hand to deal with the second enemy, Rennenkampf, who was even then plundering and burning East Prussia."

In order to expedite this, the Germans allowed the Second Army to push deeper into East Prussia, where they were only resisted by the local populace. This permitted German forces to gather on both flanks, ready to surround them when the right moment came. They were enabled in this by the wrong-headed enthusiasm of Zhilinsky, who ordered Samsonov to push even deeper into Germany. For his part, Samsonov lacked the manpower to scout out a possible flanking move or indeed the foresight



General Alexander Samsonov, whose battlefield errors led to the eradication of virtually his entire army

to do so. He was further misguided by inaccurate information from von Rennenkampf, who incorrectly reported the location of two German corps.

On the other hand, Hindenburg had a full suite of strategic information thanks to the hapless Russians' own radio communications, a captured map of Russian positions, and information from displaced German civilians. He and Ludendorff plotted the



encirclement of the Russian Second Army, with Corps and XX Corps on one side and XVII Corps and I Reserve Corps on the other. At headquarters, Hindenburg is said to have told his officers, "Gentlemen: Our preparations are so well in hand that we can sleep soundly tonight."

He had intended to spring the trap on 25 August, but circumstances meant that he had to delay while the two armies parried with each other on a relatively small scale. On the 27th, artillery barrages began, with the Second Army's right wing pushed back; Samsonov was literally unaware of this as he was out of range of the nearest radio set.

Serious casualties were inflicted on the Russians on 28 August, with half of the planned encirclement successfully deployed, and on the following day, the bloodiest of the battle, the Germans completed their rout, surrounding the Second Army and shelling them. Panicked Russian soldiers ran for their lives across farmland and were mown down mercilessly, while others were subjected to a hail of artillery. Only 10,000 of the 150,000 ensnared Russians managed to escape. Thousands more surrendered, and a final attempt to break out on 30 August was crushed. The battle was over.

That night, Samsonov escaped with a small band of loyal soldiers. As they approached a German-held town, Willenberg, he was heard repeating the words, "The Tsar trusted me: how can I face him after such a disaster?" Suddenly, he walked off the road into the nearby forest. Moments later a shot rang out in the darkness. His body was found soon after, a revolver lying nearby. He had shot himself in the head.

Samsonov probably made the right choice. He is said to have been largely responsible for the loss of three entire army corps (XIII, XV and XXIII), with 78,000 men killed or wounded, a breathtaking 92,000 soldiers captured, and 350 big guns lost, although official numbers vary. Explaining that to Tsar Nicholas II might have been tricky.

For his part, Hindenburg became a war hero. He later requested that the battle be named Tannenberg after a town 19 miles from Allenstein: this was significant because there had been a battle on the same site in 1410 when the Germans had been defeated during the Polish-Lithuanian-Teutonic War, a conflict that would end in 1411 and spell the demise of the once-feared Teutonic Order. Victory half a millennium later restored a measure of German pride, and indeed a lavish Tannenberg Memorial was installed in 1927; Hindenburg was buried there shortly after his death in 1934.

The bigger picture is that the Battle of Tannenberg, and the First Battle of the Masurian Lakes a week later where von Rennenkampf's First Army was forced to retreat in humiliation, were a huge boost to German morale. Outnumbered by the enemy but victorious nonetheless, the self-styled masters of Europe seemed to be well on their way towards achieving continental domination.

Still, one thing had not changed: Germany was surrounded by enemies on all sides. The High Command, despite its highly organised, well-trained forces, could not hope to fight an offensive war on both fronts, meaning that Germany's defences would be tested harshly and often over the next few years until eventual defeat in 1918.

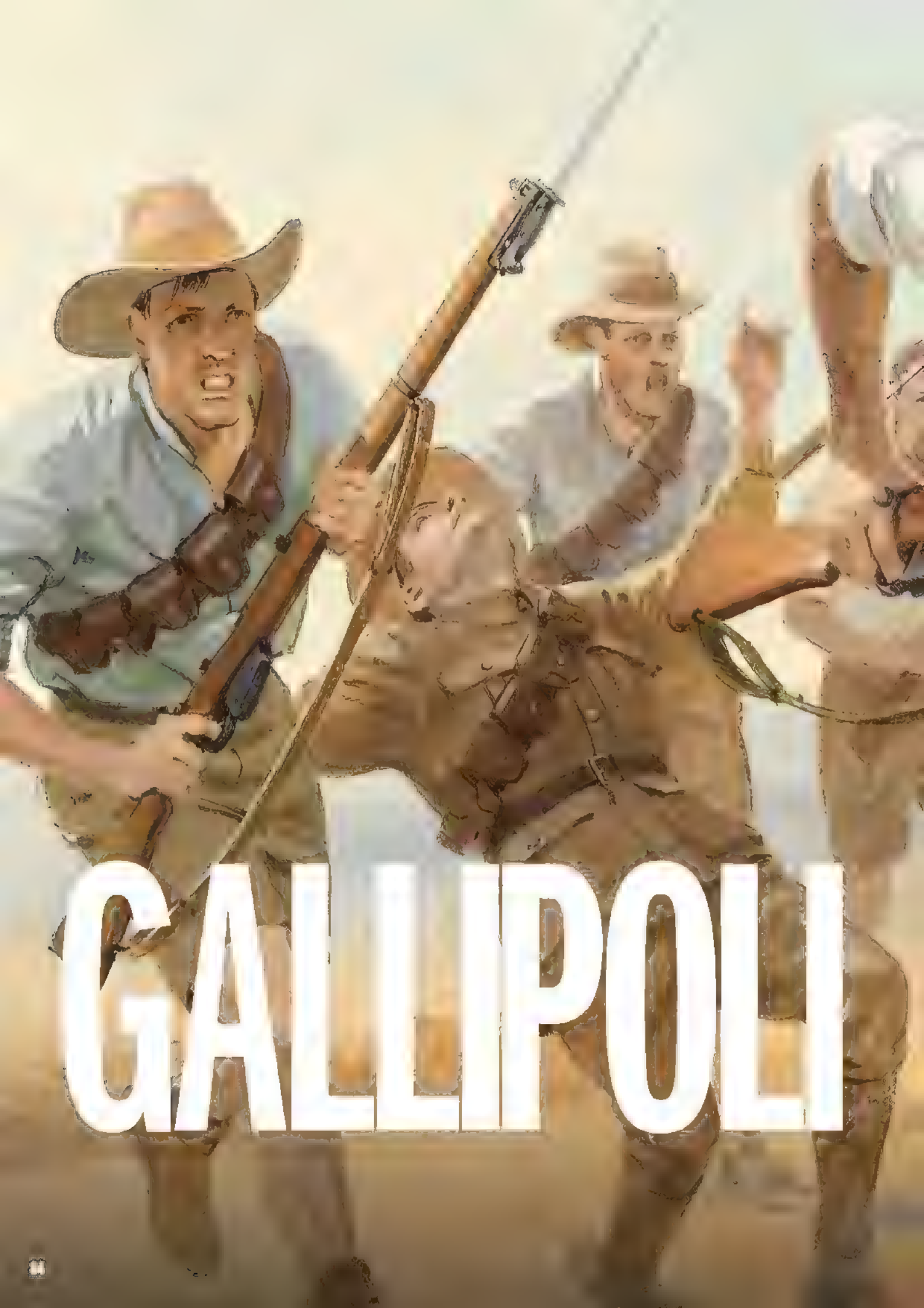
As for Russia, Tannenberg set the tone for a woeful war that would culminate with a total capitulation to draconian German demands in the form of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, an agreement that saw Russia cede vast swathes of territory and withdraw from the war.



*The 19th anniversary of the Battle of Tannenberg battle, 29 August 1933. Marshal Paul von Hindenburg leads the way, with Adolf Hitler both literally and politically behind him.*



*Hindenburg's funeral at the Tannenberg Memorial, 7 August 1934.*



# GALLIPOLI



## DARDANELLES STRAIT, 19 FEBRUARY 1915 – 9 JANUARY 1916

With the Central Powers' Western Front, Britain prepared to expose the 'soft underbelly' of the Ottoman Empire to its new fighting force, the ANZAC.

DOUGLAS MCKINNEY

Looking out onto the shoreline, Lieutenant-General William Birdwood knew that this would be a risk. Gallipoli, which was once Britain's foolproof plan in the fight against the might of the Central Powers, was fast becoming a disaster and the commander of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) had been entrusted with turning the tide of the failing campaign. The landings began on 25 April 1915

and were designed to take the heat off the British divisions up and down the coast. As the fleet of transports neared the beaches, many were

picked off by the Ottoman machine gunners before they even made it to land. For those that did make it out of the boats, they were faced with steep cliffs and a relentless, ferocious enemy led by Colonel Mustafa Kemal, the future Atatürk and 'father' of modern Turkey. Within a short space of time it became clear that this was going to be no easy battle.

For a campaign that was meant to end the stalemate on the Western Front, progression was remarkably slow and trenches were soon constructed. The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) would lose hundreds of soldiers in the first few days as they dug in to protect a small beachhead and await orders.

## A ready and willing force

Rewind to late 1914 and the picture is a very different one for the ANZAC soldiers. Rather than facing the mud of northern France like the majority of the British Army, including many Australians and New Zealanders, the corps was training on the sands of the Sahara Desert. With training and accommodation facilities in short supply back in England, this was deemed the best place to get the ANZAC troops prepared for the heat of battle.

Eagerly awaiting deployment, the war effort was actually very popular in Australasia. Australian Prime Minister Joseph Cook pledged his support to Britain and many rushed to be recruited for the army, as they didn't want to miss out on the adventure. Many 'boy soldiers' even lied about their ages to become part of this high-paid job that will, of course, be over by Christmas. Australia instantly promised 20,000 men for the cause and raised the AIF. New Zealand wasn't far behind, and the 8,454-strong New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) left the capital Wellington in October 1914, eager to join the fighting. After their arrival, the NZEF troops were first pressed into action in the Suez Canal, where they helped to repel an Ottoman raid on the important waterway.

Fast forward to April 1915 and the wheels were now in motion for the ANZAC deployment from Egypt to Turkey. Gallipoli and glory beckoned. Or so they thought.

Almost half of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force's (MEF) 75,000 troops were made up of recruits from Australia and New Zealand. Saddled with a 88-pound pack full of equipment and supplies, the ANZAC troops entered the lion's den of ANZAC Cove on that fateful day in April 1915 and established a beachhead against the opposing Ottomans.

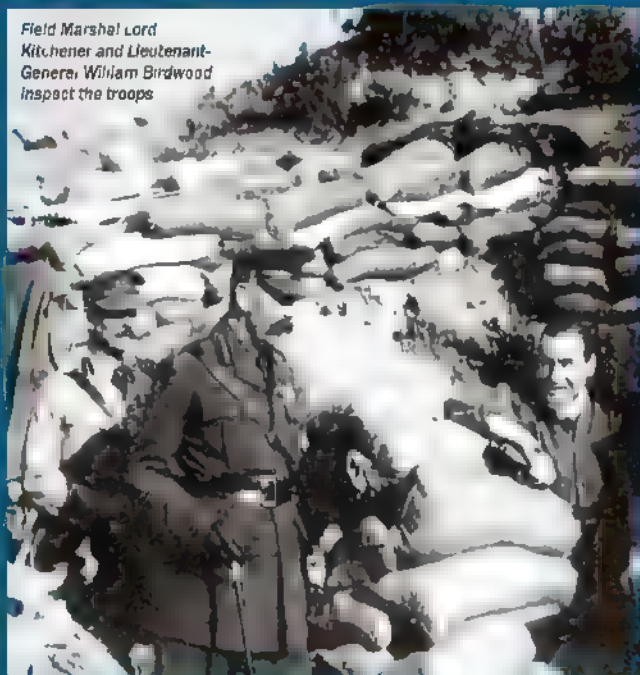
The peaceful way of life back home seemed far away and a hot summer was on the horizon. As the troops were tormented by the Turkish heat and swarms of insects, they now realised this was what war was really like.

*An Australian soldier rescues a wounded comrade from no-man's land in a brave attempt to get him to a field hospital.*



**"ALMOST HALF OF THE MEDITERRANEAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE'S 75,000 TROOPS WERE MADE UP OF RECRUITS FROM AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND"**

*Field Marshal Lord Kitchener and Lieutenant-General William Birdwood inspect the troops*



## WHY ATTACK GALLIPOLI?

*The risky operation full of promise that backfired spectacularly for the British Empire*

Gallipoli was a failure for the British and is remembered for the frequent blunders made by the Allied hierarchy and the spirited defence of the peninsula by the Ottomans.

The campaign was the brainchild of Winston Churchill – then First Lord of the Admiralty – who desired a second front against the Central Powers. A surge through the 'soft underbelly of Europe' would weaken the German and Austrian lines on the Western and Eastern Fronts. It was believed that this would be a quick-fix for the deadlock in Europe.

The campaign began on 19 February 1915 with the mighty Royal Navy sailing into the Dardanelles, a strait on the west coast of Turkey,

with the aim of bombarding and capturing Constantinople. The poor weather and tougher-than-expected Turkish fortifications damaged the Royal Navy considerably and three battleships were sunk. Army assistance, including the ANZAC troops, was called in by April but could only establish small footholds as the Ottomans defended their homeland doggedly.

This stalemate would drag on for a number of months as offensives continually proved ineffectual. In December 1915, British command decided that enough was enough and pulled the troops out. It was back to the Western Front for yet more bloodshed.



# ANZAC RECRUIT

## Citizen soldiers of the Empire

The British Army incorporated a large contingent of troops from all over the Empire to swell its ranks. The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) were stationed in Egypt ready for action in Gallipoli.

### BAYONET

A bayonet was attached to the end of the rifle for close-quarters combat. The Ottomans carried swords and lances, so this blade could be invaluable when low on ammunition.

### EQUIPMENT

A standard ANZAC soldier would carry on their Sam Browne belt a revolver holster, ammo pouch, sword frog, compass, binoculars, map case, shovel, haversack and water bottle.

### RIFLE

The rifle of choice for an ANZAC soldier was the trusty bolt-action Lee Enfield MK I rifle. These were wielded by the main infantry while officers carried revolvers.

### MOUNTED RIFLE HAT

Known as the 'slouch hat' the New Zealand version here was slightly different to its Australian counterpart and nicknamed 'the lemon squeezer'. A different coloured cloth band denoted rank and service branch.

### UNIFORM

Khaki was the order of the day and helped the ANZAC troops stay concealed in the heat of the Turkish sun. The New Zealand uniform was actually slightly greener than British versions.

### RATIONS

On average, 66lb of rations would be carried. The most common foods were bully beef, hard biscuits, tea, sugar and beef cubes. They would also carry firewood and spare clothing.

## The troops dig in

Life on ANZAC Cove was harsh and painfully repetitive. The daily routine on the tiny three-mile bay would consist of observing and sniping enemy positions, with the occasional bombing run. Life behind the front line saw support trenches ferry supplies to the front. Despite their perilous situation, it is well known that to unwind the Australians swam in the warm waters of the Aegean Sea. Life was especially difficult for the Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC), who were often undermanned and undersupplied. Fresh water was particularly scarce and the craving for it was only heightened by the diet of salty bully beef and dry biscuits.

One of the most famous men of the AAMC was John Simpson, who led a stretcher-carrying donkey around the battlefield to pick up the injured and transport them to safety behind the lines. Despite the medical staff's best efforts, typhoid and dysentery were common, and these illnesses, along with poor nutrition, gradually wore down the ANZAC troops. Many reports suggest that treatment for the wounded was even worse than on the Western Front.

Between April and August 1915, neither the Ottomans nor the ANZAC forces were able to break the deadlock. Trench warfare unfolded and, unlike the British hierarchy had hoped, the ANZAC divisions were unable to break through.

### MAXIM MACHINE GUN

The Maxim boasted an excellent fire rate but was soon replaced by the more reliable Vickers and Hotchkiss guns. Machine guns were a new type of weapon designed to end the stalemate of the trenches.

### GARLAND TRENCH MORTAR

The most-used mortar of the Gallipoli Campaign, the Garland proved useful at clearing enemy trenches. Projectiles were aimed using a telescope and sent in at a 45-degree angle using a powder charge.

### Ingenuity may save the day

In early May, the New Zealand Infantry Brigade was tasked with a new objective that would hopefully outmanoeuvre the resolute Ottomans. The brigade was taken south to Helles, where British divisions were engaged in combat. Their mission was an assault on the village of Krithia that would join the British forces up with the ANZAC contingent. Progress was initially encouraging but the advance soon turned into a series of battles; 800 men were lost.

The ANZAC contribution to the war effort wasn't limited to the front line. Lurking in the straits was an Australian submarine by the name of AE2, which constantly harassed the Ottoman Navy deep inside its territory. Sinking destroyers, battleships and gunboats, the AE2 eventually ran out of luck on 30 April when it was sunk by an Ottoman torpedo boat after trying to rendezvous with a British submarine. Captain Henry Stoker was left with no option but to scuttle the vessel and the 35-man crew were captured as prisoners of war.

Back on the rocky heights of ANZAC Cove, the remainder of the Australasian corps was struggling against the Turkish defences. Traversing the cliffs while dodging machine-gun fire was a fruitless

exercise, especially as the defenders were being constantly reinforced.

The periscope rifle was one invention that made life easier for the ANZAC troops. Devised by Sergeant William Beach of the 2nd Battalion of the A.F., mirrors were attached to the sight of a rifle, allowing soldiers to have a view above the trench without sticking their head in the Ottoman crosshairs. String was also attached so the trigger could be pulled without their hands getting in the line of fire.

There was also the jam tin bomb. Crudely made, this was another excellent improvisation from the ANZACs and was simply an old tin filled with whatever explosives they could get their hands on. Although it was a plucky invention that saw extended use across the frontlines.

On 15 May the ANZACs lost their chief of general staff when Major General WT Bridges was shot by an Ottoman sniper. This was followed by a huge Ottoman push of 42,000 men on 18 May that was repulsed by the ANZAC forces. Reinforcements in the shape of the Australian 2nd and 3rd Light Horse Brigades arrived but there was still no release from the cove. Despite the ANZAC's best efforts, there was seemingly no way of ending the stalemate.

**"SINKING DESTROYERS, BATTLESHIPS AND GUNBOATS, THE AE2 EVENTUALLY RAN OUT OF LUCK ON 30 APRIL WHEN IT WAS SUNK BY AN OTTOMAN TORPEDO BOAT"**



## THE BATTLE OF LONE PINE

6-9 AUGUST 1915

**If there was any chance of the August Offensive working, this feint, attempted at over 300 feet above Anzac Cove, would have to succeed**

By August 1915, the ANZAC regiments were already an integral part of the British force. Their mission on this day was to draw the Ottoman armies away from Chunuk Bair to give the August Offensive a chance of succeeding. The ANZAC artillery barrage ceased at 5.30 p.m. Battle was about to begin.

### 02 TRENCH DEFENCE

In a flash the ANZAC troops reached the shocked Ottoman encampment. The ANZAC soldiers were then surprised themselves as the trenches were roofed with pine logs. Unable to force their way in and unsure of what to do, many soldiers became sitting ducks and were shot down.

### 01 BREAKOUT

On the shores of the Aegean Sea, Allied regional Commander in Chief Sir Ian Hamilton established a line and called an end to the artillery barrage. At 5.30 p.m., 4,600 Australians from the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Battalions charged the Ottoman positions on Hill 971 with the sun on their backs.



**Above:** Australian infantry after the battle. Ottoman bodies can be seen strewn across the top of the trench.

**Left:** Troops would carry up to 88lb of supplies with them when they travelled, including food and spare clothing.



**04 VICTORY IN THE DARK**

Some men avoided the trenches altogether and headed for the communication and reserve trenches to the rear. The others scored massive gains in the Ottoman trenches and by 8 p.m. half an hour after the first whistle was blown, the ANZAC troops had taken control and rooted out the Ottoman resistance.

**07 VICTORY**

Joined now by the 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 12th Battalions, the ANZAC forces had succeeded in drawing in the whole immediate Ottoman 16th Division reserve as the enemy retreated. Up to 10,000 (3,000 ANZAC, 7,000 Ottoman) had perished in just four days and seven Victoria Crosses were awarded to the brave ANZAC troops.

**05 TUNNELLED ASSAULT**

Australian engineers dug across no-man's land to give reinforcements a safe passage. The Ottomans then came back in force and four days and nights of hand-to-hand fighting began. It was so close quarters that often firearms could not be used and the weapons of choice were unfixed bayonets and fists.

**06 ANZACS SEIZE THE ADVANTAGE**

Struggles were usually one on one, with friendly fire from both sides common in the darkness of the trenches. Tin bombs and Stielhandgranate were thrown back and forth. The trenches were soon piled up with bodies but the ANZAC soldiers had gained the upper hand and were beginning to push the Ottomans back.

**03 ENTRY**

In desperation, the ANZAC soldiers shot, bombed and bayoneted through the timber roofs as they scrambled into the trenches. The fighting became close-quarters and each ANZAC wore a white armband to tell friend from foe in the maze of trenches, both sides dashed around corners and fired wildly as chaos erupted.

**THE ENEMY IN DETAIL****The Gallipoli Campaign from the other side of the lines**

By the outbreak of the war, the Ottomans were in no fit state for another conflict. After losing land and money in the First and Second Balkan Wars, they were described as the 'sick man of Europe'. The Ottomans had originally desired an alliance with Britain but this was rebuffed. Impressed with Germany's growing power, they eventually sided with the Central Powers.

The empire had a long-standing rivalry with Russia and was determined to access Russian

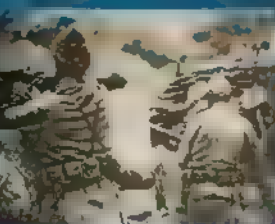
seaports. Their assault on Russia's Black Sea ports inadvertently caused the Gallipoli Campaign as the Russians appealed for support from their allies.

The Straits of Dardanelles were littered with mines that wreaked havoc with the Royal Navy's ships. What the British didn't know, however, was that the naval bombardment had nearly eradicated all of the Ottoman troops in the area. The withdrawal allowed commander Mustafa Kemal to bring in five corps worth of reinforcements from the Fifth Army to bolster Ottoman strength.

The army put out by the Ottoman Empire at Gallipoli was heavily reliant on assistance from Germany and Austria. They had borrowed the idea of khaki uniforms from them and now wore a *kabala* rather than the traditional Turkish *fez*.

The empire had very little munitions of their own so both the infantry and cavalry wielded either the Mauser 1893 or Gewehr 98 rifle, again provided by the Germans. The Ottomans on the peninsula also had swords, pistols and lances, as well as Stielhandgranate, a grenade commonly associated with German troops.

Gallipoli was the most successful Ottoman action of the war as the British underestimated the defences of the straits.



**"AS WE CAPTURED LONE PINE WE FELT LIKE WILD BEASTS AND AS FAST AS OUR MEN WENT DOWN ANOTHER WOULD TAKE HIS PLACE, BUT SOON THE WOUNDED WERE PILED UP THREE OR FOUR DEEP AND THE MOANS OF OUR POOR FELLOWS AND ALSO THE TURKS WE TRAMPED ON WAS AWFUL"**

Private Tom Billings







A group of Australian troops  
carefully observing the sea from  
an Ottoman trench.

### Failure after failure

A hastily arranged armistice took place on 24 May so both sides could collect the fallen that now littered the battlefield. The ceasefire lasted from 7.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. before the fighting resumed for another few months. Something had to give, and by August the British commanders had come up with a new idea – the August Offensive.

One of the first of these new engagements was the Battle of the Nek on 7 August 1915. The Australian 3rd Horse Brigade was entrusted with an advance on a thin strip of land known as the Nek. Here, there were a number of Turkish trenches that, if taken, would represent a significant foothold for the British. The attack began at 4.30 a.m. with support from an offshore destroyer that provided an artillery barrage.

Unfortunately, in one of the miscalculations that seemed to happen at Gallipoli so frequently, the bombardment was unleashed seven minutes early and the Ottomans had time to shelter and then return to their positions ready for the cavalry charge. In a scene reminiscent of the Charge of the Light Brigade, the Ottoman machine-gun fire cut down the cavalry and infantry. More than 300 died in the massacre with next to no territorial gain.

While the Australians were led to the slaughter at Nek, the New Zealanders were facing problems of their own at Chunuk Bair, a 13-day struggle to the summit of the Sarik Bair ridge.

After fierce resistance on the ascent, the New Zealanders arrived to find the peak deserted and the Wellington and Auckland Battalions were forced to hold off a renewed Ottoman advance on the top at dawn on 8 August. Under increasing pressure from artillery strikes and machine-gun fire, the stubborn New Zealanders were eventually bailed out by incoming British troops, who themselves were soon taken out by a mass Ottoman counterattack.

Later in the month, the Battle of Hill 60 on 21 August proved to be just as disastrous for both Australian and New Zealand soldiers. After the failures at Nek and Chunuk Bair, this battle represented the last throw of the dice for the weary divisions. The ANZAC troops managed to get among the maze of Ottoman trenches but were unable to force them out of their positions completely. With a distinct lack of ammunition and minimal artillery support, the attack soon lost its crucial momentum. The exhausted British lost up to 2,500 men as the Ottomans once again proved too strong.

The main British divisions were struggling themselves. Suvla Bay was a small, lightly defended enclave that was seen by the British as an ideal way to break the deadlock and finally hit the Ottomans where it hurt. Some 63,000 Allied troops swarmed into the area and made massive gains but could not link up with ANZAC Cove before they were repulsed.

This was the final straw for Field Lord Marshal Kitchener who, after a visit, declared that evacuation was the only way to end this costly campaign. Long-standing Commander in Chief Sir Ian Hamilton was replaced by Charles Munro as the evacuation programme got under way.

**"LACKING AMMUNITION AND MINIMAL ARTILLERY SUPPORT, THE ATTACK SOON LOST ITS CRUCIAL MOMENTUM"**

## THE EVACUATION FROM THE COVE

The bloodshed had gone on for too long, and by November 1915 it was time to withdraw from ANZAC Cove

After the loss of Hill 60 on 29 August 1915, commanders decided that withdrawal was now the only option available to the British. The idea of reinforcement and navy barrage was toyed with but on 13 November Lord Kitchener observed ANZAC Cove and declared an imminent evacuation. The ANZAC role in Gallipoli was over.

### 04 REDUCING THE GARRISON

Beginning on 15 December, 36,000 ANZAC soldiers were withdrawn over five nights. Troops were evacuated in small batches and unneeded ammunition was burned or destroyed. Machine gunners were left to the final night due to their heavy loads of equipment. The riflemen departed setting up drip rifles as they went.

### 01 PREPARATION FOR DEPARTURE

The ANZAC troops had heard rumours of an evacuation so, to maintain order, the commanders informed the troops that they were heading to Lemnos, Greece, for a rest. To prepare for this false journey, the military stores were emptied of all supplies. The infantry remained suspicious.

### 06 FINAL PHASE

The evacuation was designed and prepared by officers who knew exactly what was best for their men. By 20 December the withdrawal from ANZAC Cove was complete without a single loss of life. More than 10,000 ANZACs were killed in the campaign, so the safe removal of a total of 105,000 men and 300 field guns was a huge relief to all.



Helles Cove pictured just before the evacuation of the last remaining troops



### 03 DELAYS AND UNREST

It was crucial to complete the evacuation as quickly as possible, as if the Ottomans discovered the truth they could break through against the depleting Allied lines. However, a blizzard battered the shoreline on 7 December, making evacuation extremely difficult.

### 02 SILENT STUMTS

From late November onwards, it was declared that no artillery fire or sniping would be allowed. The belief was that the Ottomans would see this as the ANZAC preparing for winter rather than a withdrawal. Regular rifle fire kept the enemy unaware of any scale back in strength.

### 05 EVACUATION IN FULL FLOW

More and more transports arrived to ferry the troops to safety. First in the pecking order were support troops and reserves. The fighting units were removed gradually so they could keep fighting the battle and provoking the Ottoman lines. By 19 December, only 10,000 troops remained.

## THE NIGHT OF THE EVACUATION

Fleeing under the cover of darkness, the British used a new rifle to aid their escape.

Churchill was convinced that the Gallipoli Campaign was a good idea, but even he had to give up the ghost as the new year dawned. After approximately 200,000 Allied casualties, the decision was taken to cut losses and evacuate. In December 1915, ANZAC Cove was the first to be abandoned and 36,000 troops were cleared within five nights with no loss of life. The next areas to be evacuated were Suvla Bay and Helles Bay. The last troops stepped on to the transports on 9 January 1916. Gallipoli was over and 142,000 men had been rescued.

William Birdwood was in charge of the evacuations and they were undoubtedly the biggest success of the whole campaign. The forces were moved under the cover of darkness as they kept up their attacks during the day to not draw attention to the imminent withdrawal.

It was so sneaky that the Ottomans shelled empty trenches after the British forces were long gone. The successful evacuation is partly down to an innovative tactic used by the British – the drip rifle. Using a simple system of water cans and string, rifles were set up to fire automatically at the Ottomans while the remaining troops scampered to safety.

### FIRST MECHANISM

Invented by Australian Lance Corporal William Soury, the top can is filled with water, which drips into the lower can after the fleeing soldier punches a hole in the bottom.

### SANDBAG SUPPORT

Plopped up on the top of a trench, the drip rifle would be aimed at the Ottoman positions to keep them at bay as the soldiers fled.

### SECOND MECHANISM

The bottom can is attached to a string which passes over a pulley. The can is heavy with water, the firing would be automatic and convincing enough to fool the Ottomans.

## A successful evacuation

The ANZAC contingent had now been stationed at the cove for a number of months and winter was looming. Despite being exhausted, the decision to evacuate was kept from the ANZAC troops as long as possible. These troops had come halfway around the world and even though many were diseased and sick, the decision to retreat when they had made little to no territorial gain would crush morale.

The evacuation was covered up by a false restocking mission to Lemnos, but whispers were frequent and by November the game was up. This was to be no quick withdrawal though. The evacuation was to be done in stages and in the most discreet way so the Ottomans did not suspect a thing.

By day the ANZACS would keep up their attacks as usual, but by night a careful retreat was executed. Small numbers would depart as the rest of the division fired sporadically at the enemy to give the illusion that troops were still fighting. The entire evacuation took five days and was so well disguised that the Ottoman artillery bombarded the empty trenches for days afterwards.

The ANZAC forces lost 8,709 Australians and 2,701 New Zealanders at Gallipoli, with many more, perhaps up to 20,000, wounded. The campaign was a complete failure but could have been so much worse for the British if it wasn't for the bravery and tenacity of these men from the other side of the globe.

In the grand scheme of things, Gallipoli was not a defining campaign, with events on the Western and Eastern Fronts much more significant in the face of the Central Powers.

After the evacuation, the ANZACS went on to serve with distinction on the Western Front and many other theatres of war in World War I. The events of 1915 still live long in the memory of Australians, New Zealanders and also Turks.

The success of the campaign under future president Mustafa Kemal kick-started a Turkish revival that gave a renewed sense of identity and helped aid the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the Turkish War of Independence. Back Down Under, remembering the sacrifice is an annual tradition for two young countries: a bloody, brutal experience that will forever bind them together.

## THE ANZAC LEGACY

The ANZAC's heroism and bravery at Gallipoli lives on to this day

A celebration of the wartime spirit shown by soldiers from Australia and New Zealand, the first ANZAC Day was in 1916 and has been going ever since, with marches and services throughout the two countries. The day begins at dawn on 25 April, the date that ANZAC troops first landed on the peninsula. Rosemary is traditionally worn as it was commonly found on the battlefields at Gallipoli. There is also a tradition of making the ANZAC biscuit to remember the rations sent from home to the frontlines. A special year for the remembrance was 1990, when veterans went back to the sites of the battles to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the campaign.

## "THEY EARNED A REPUTATION AS TOUGH FIGHTERS"

We speak to Dr Damien Fenton, Honorary Research Fellow at Massey University in Wellington, New Zealand, about the ANZAC campaign



### WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF THE ANZACS IN THE CAMPAIGN?

The original role of the 36,000-strong ANZAC was to cover the British landing near Gaba Tepe and support the British landings at Cape Helles by advancing inland to capture the Sari Bair Range and Maltepe, thereby cutting the Ottoman lines of communication with their troops at Helles. Instead they landed at the wrong place – Ari Burnu (ANZAC Cove) – and ended up defending their tiny two-mile-square beachhead for the next three months while the British and French concentrated on trying to break out of Cape Helles.

In late July, the NZEF's attention switched to the ANZAC enclave, which became the focal point of the Sari Bair Offensive in August. The ANZACs played a leading role in this ultimately doomed offensive and suffered accordingly. ANZAC casualties for between 8 and 10 August amounted to 12,000. After more heavy fighting in late August to consolidate the link-up between ANZAC and Suvla, the ANZACs settled back into the daily grind of trench warfare to defend their now greatly expanded perimeter until the final evacuation in December.

### WHAT TECHNOLOGY, WEAPONS AND METHODS OF WARFARE WERE USED BY THE ANZACS?

The volunteer citizen-soldiers of the AIF and NZEF who served in Gallipoli in 1915 had been organised, trained and equipped on the basis of previous British Army regulations, albeit with a few

local variations in uniform and equipment. New Zealand brigades predominated but both expeditionary forces contained a high proportion of mounted infantry regiments, Australian Light Horse and New Zealand Mounted Rifles accordingly.

The 25 April landing was an all-infantry affair with the mounted regiments arriving at ANZAC as reinforcements on 12 May, without their horses. The infantry and mounted troops from both Dominions soon earned a reputation as tough, aggressive fighters who quickly adapted to the conditions of trench warfare. Their field artillery batteries were equipped with modern 18-pounders and 4.5-inch howitzers, which, to the surprise of the ANZACs, made them better equipped than many of the British Territorial or New Army artillery batteries sent out to Gallipoli.

### HOW DID THE AUSTRALIAN UNITS DIFFER FROM THE NEW ZEALAND UNITS?

It was often hard for outsiders to distinguish the soldiers from the two Dominions, much to the annoyance of the New Zealanders, who usually found themselves mistaken for Australians. In 1914-15, the famous 'Aussie' slouch hat was actually also standard kit for most New Zealand infantry and mounted units. This changed when the NZEF adopted the 'lemon squeezer' felt hat as a deliberate effort to differentiate themselves from the AIF. In demeanour, the New Zealanders were often noted as being less boisterous than the Australians and more willing to take prisoners. But in terms of fighting abilities, there was nothing between them.



This painting by Walter Pinder Bowring shows the ANZACs returning home

Images: Alamy, Corbis, Shutterstock, Hearst, Getty



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# UNSUNG HEROES BEHIND THE "MIRACLE"

NORTHERN FRANCE, 27 MAY - 4 JUNE 1940

Look back on the events leading to, survival and rescue during  
one of the bloodiest battles in military history.

"IT WAS HELL ON EARTH ON THE  
BEACH ITSELF. I DUG OUT MY SLIT  
TRENCH WITH MY HELMET"





**S**ummer, 1940, and on a beach in northern France hundreds of thousands of Allied troops are stranded – literally squeezed into the sea by the German blitzkrieg. Among the sand dunes is a 20-year-old despatch rider of the British Expeditionary Force who attempts to shelter from the relentless bombardment of Luftwaffe air attacks. His only defence is a mere slit trench that he has dug out with his own tin helmet. Sand is blown high in the sky all around him and the noise is deafening. The young soldier has already experienced a litany of grim incidents on the road to the beach, but he now wearily becomes resigned to the fact that he may not survive another 24 hours. Only a miracle can save him now.

The scene of this carnage was a place that changed the course of history. Dunkirk. Between 27 May and 4 June 1940, over 338,000 British, French, Canadian and Belgian troops were successfully evacuated against huge odds in over 900 vessels – the majority of them privately owned.

After the horror of the Battle of France the evacuation became instantly iconic and epitomised Britain's resolve to continue fighting Nazi Germany no matter what the cost. One of the evacuated soldiers was the beleaguered despatch rider, gunner Garth Wright. Now aged 97 Wright is a living symbol of the "Dunkirk spirit", and 77 years after his brutal experiences in France he tells us the moving story of both his and his army's remarkable survival against the odds.

#### 'Basic' training

Born on 13 August, 1919, Wright, a native of Devon, joined the British Army with some of his friends before war broke out. "I joined around June-July 1939. When I joined up there were five of us originally. There was myself, Ken Stephens, Roger 'Reg' Palmer, Harry Anderson and Peter Dodd – we were brothers in arms. We went across as one when war broke out."

Wright and his friends joined 153 Battery, 51st Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery, and he initially trained as a motorcycle despatch rider.

However, his training in Devon was rudimentary. "There were Bofors 40mm anti-aircraft guns pulled by a tractor, which I drove. I was a despatch driver to start with and I finished up as a tractor driver! Our basic training consisted of going up to Pasterdown on a Sunday and we'd have perhaps one gun up there. Somebody would run around among the gorse bushes and suddenly pop up with his hat in the air and the sergeant would give the target bearings. That was virtually the only training we had before we went into serious action in 1940. It was very, very basic indeed."

Wright heard Neville Chamberlain's announcement that war had been declared on the radio during a church service at Tavistock Guildhall. Despite the enthusiasm of others Wright remembers feeling uneasy. "Some of the boys cheered, and at the time I wondered what they were cheering at because I knew then that it wasn't going to be a short affair. We were in for a pretty long haul, which indeed it was."

Events moved quickly for 153 Battery. "It was a Sunday morning when war was declared. We were then on our bikes. We set off for Avonmouth on the Monday morning and we left a lot of the young lads and the older boys behind. We just had a skeleton battery made up of people of the sort of age that would be expected to go to the front."

Nevertheless, seasoned soldiers soon joined Wright. "We went up to Thursley camp to pick up some more vehicles, a couple more guns and also some reservists that had already done their 21

**"AT NIGHT THERE WAS A RED GLOW IN THE SKY. BY DAY THE OIL TANKS WERE ONE OF THE GERMANS' FIRST TARGETS & THERE WAS A BLACK POOL OF SMOKE A MILE HIGH DRIFTING ALONG"**

*Below: Garth Wright (front row, far right on floor) with other members of 153 Battery, 51st Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Vitry-en-Artois, France, November 1939. Among the troops are his friends Harry Anderson, Peter Dodd and Owen Kellaway; only Wright and Kellaway survived the war*



*"Hell on Earth": British infantry shooting at German aircraft during the evacuation, June 1940. Luftwaffe attacks were relentless at Dunkirk*

years in India. About a third of our battery was made up of these old sweats."

### The shadow of WWI

The battery was soon shipped out from Avonmouth, and Wright landed with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) at Saint-Nazaire on the French Atlantic coast, where he received a cultural shock. "We were greeted by a meal from the French boys – they were dishing out bowls of soup. I questioned the soup and said, 'Is this horse?' They almost gave me a wallop with the ladle so I thought I better keep my mouth shut and eat up!"

Wright was transported through France and eventually arrived close to the Belgian border, where he was primarily located at Seclin aerodrome near Lille. His main task was the defence of the airport, but one of his assignments was eerily grim.

"Wherever we went we dug in and used our guns; that was the basic job to do. I was digging out a gun pit at Merville, and every shovel full of earth that came up had a memento of a terrible battle from WWI: cap badges, buttons and little bits of bone. What a terrible war that must have been. Farmers were going around taking out shells and unexploded stuff, just parking it beside the field. I could see massive things such as artillery pieces. It was everywhere."

Wright was posted in the Seclin area for months between late 1939 and early 1940, but his "phoney war" would change irrevocably with the sudden German invasion of France in May.

### Blitzkrieg

On 10 May 1940, German forces swept through the Netherlands and Belgium, with the Dutch

surrendering four days later. The Allies attempted to push into Belgium but were forced back and the Germans entered France on 13 May through the Ardennes forest near Sedan. Despite stiff resistance, Panzer tanks broke out and raced towards the English Channel with extensive Luftwaffe air support. The vanguard reached the Channel on 20 May and the Allies were now cut in two and facing annihilation.

The BEF was still largely based on the French-Belgian border, but despite their fierce opposition to the relentless onslaught, they were forced back to an area of the French coast that focused around the port of Dunkirk. The Allies were experiencing 'blitzkrieg', and for men like Wright who were on the receiving end, the German attack was a shock.

"The Germans set off with their blitzkrieg lightning strike, and it was indeed! It came through us like a dose of salts – coming down and circling us in no time, and the roads were choked up with refugees and civilians."

Wright recalls how unprepared the Allies were. "It was really frightening. It was men against boys really – they'd had armoured experience on other fields of war in Poland and Czechoslovakia. We weren't prepared for that sort of warfare, and the French in particular were still horse drawn. We

were not much in advance of them at all. It was a blitzkrieg all right."

Now in full retreat towards Dunkirk, both soldiers and civilian refugees fled from the Germans, and the result was chaos. "The refugees choked the roads, and to make matters worse, the Germans came down with their Me109s strafing them. The refugees, poor devils, were killed or choking the roads. You couldn't move. If we did try any manoeuvre or try to put up a fight we couldn't have done it, and the Germans had no interest in life; they just rolled right through them."

Wright's main problems from the air were Junkers Ju 87 'Stuka' dive-bombers. "A lot of people pooh-pooed the Stuka but by God it was an effective plane. It was sure to hit the target, you just aimed the plane. The only target the gunner on the ground had was a little thin line coming down. You could see the bomb leave the plane and you knew damn well that it was going to land directly on your gun. What do you do? Scarper, or do you stick it out? Well of course it was pretty frightening."

### A chaotic retreat

During the offensive Wright found himself alone at one point while driving a truck and had a close

**"THE REFUGEES CHOKED THE ROADS, AND TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, THE GERMANS CAME DOWN WITH THEIR ME109S STRAFING THEM. THE REFUGEES, POOR DEVILS, WERE KILLED OR CHOKING THE ROADS. YOU COULDN'T MOVE"**



Above: War refugees on a French road. The roads to Dunkirk were choked with soldiers and fleeing civilians



Above: Garth Wright was trained on the Swedish-built Bofors 40mm anti-aircraft multipurpose auto-cannon



Above: Burning oil tanks at Dunkirk, late May 1940

Below: Huge lines of troops assemble in snaking queues while awaiting evacuation in one of the most iconic images from Operation Dynamo





# GUNNER WRIGHT'S PERILOUS MOTORCYCLE ROUTE

A vital connection between HQ and the troops, Wright risked a sniper's bullet to help the evacuation

As a gunner in the Royal Artillery, Garth Wright assisted with the heavy defence of the BEF in the area around Dunkirk. His special task was to act as a despatch rider between the British headquarters in Dunkirk and the outlying camp at Bray-Dunes, another important place of embarkation. His route was along a canal, which was most likely the Canal de Fournes.

He carried messages and supplies between the two camps, a journey of 6.59 miles each way.

Wright would have performed his dangerous task on motorcycles such as the Norton WD (War Department) Big 4 and Norton WD 38H. Initially designed between 1907 and 1911 respectively, the Big 4 and 38H were first supplied to the British

Armies during the 1830s and were used for despatch riding, training, reconnaissance, and other escort duties.

Although they could reach a top speed of 60mph, Wright recalls that he could not reach 50mph while riding at Dunkirk. Over a 48-hour period, a German sniper twice shot at Wright.

**"IT WAS REALLY FRIGHTENING. IT WAS MEN AGAINST BOYS"**



Right: Norton Motorcycle Company produced over 100,000 motorcycles for the British war effort during WWII, including 4,700 of the 'Big 4' powered tripartite hauled sidecars.



A French soldier observes the destruction left behind after a German aerial bombing raid, 1 June 1940



encounter with enemy troops that could easily have ended in his execution

"I went down to the HQ at Amiens and on the way back I got cut off by Jerry. I was on my own. I stopped at a café, got a bottle of booze, sat on the step of the café and as soon as sat dogs and kids came around. A French boy came up and I gave him a bar of chocolate and we sat together. All of a sudden up ahead a half-track went by with SS onboard - they didn't take prisoners, so I thought it was probably time to move! I made my way back to the smoke at Dunkirk."

Allied relations sometimes broke down on the retreat, as Wright discovered. "On the way I was challenged by some French or Belgians. They wanted to ride on my truck and I said no. I had a

girl on board, she had asked me to take her to a maternity hospital nearby as she was heavily pregnant, so I said I would take her there and drop her off. She was sat beside me and they raised their guns. I took out my Tommy gun and said, "Right, who's first?" and they backed off. I went on, dropped the girl off and picked the convoy up."

Following this incident, Wright drove on with a truck laden with RAF supplies including whisky and cigarettes that he had gathered from an abandoned airfield. The truck became damaged and broke down, and Wright was forced to make a decision. "I picked the convoy up but the bloomin' truck got bogged down. The soldiers nearby said, 'Get over this side.' There was a lorry in front of me who had a fag on and all of the petrol from the truck was running into the drain. All of my salvaged supplies were on board this truck and I thought 'Why the devil should anybody else have it?' I let the lorry go on smoking and when he dropped the fag end the whole damn lot went up. All of the supplies, including booze, went up in smoke!"

By now the fires of Dunkirk were visible. "At night there was a red glow in the sky. By day the oil tanks were one of the Germans' first targets and there

**"I WAS DIGGING OUT A GUN PIT AT MERVILLE AND EVERY SHOVEL FULL OF EARTH THAT CAME UP HAD A MEMENTO OF A TERRIBLE BATTLE FROM WWI: CAP BADGES, BUTTONS AND LITTLE BITS OF BONE. WHAT A TERRIBLE WAR THAT MUST HAVE BEEN"**

was a black pool of smoke a mile high drifting along. Jerry used to come through that smoke and drive down onto us."

The BEF was now completely surrounded by the Germans around the Dunkirk pocket, and Wright's battery was approaching the town when tragedy struck him personally.

"The column was being led by my friend Ken Stephens, who was a despatch rider. The Stukas bombed the head of the column and poor old Ken was blown off his bike and killed by the side of the road. A 1,500-weight truck followed him. Those onboard were all killed and the boy on the tail boards was severely injured."

It was a terrible start to a situation that had quickly become nightmarish.

#### "Hell on Earth"

Dunkirk in May 1940 was a scene of chaos. During the spring, BEF numbers in France had grown to a peak of 400,000, and tens of thousands had already been killed during the blitzkrieg offensive. The bulk of the BEF, the remnants of three French armies and a contingent of Belgian

Men of the Royal Ulster Rifles attempting to launch boats that will take them to waiting destroyers, 1 June 1940



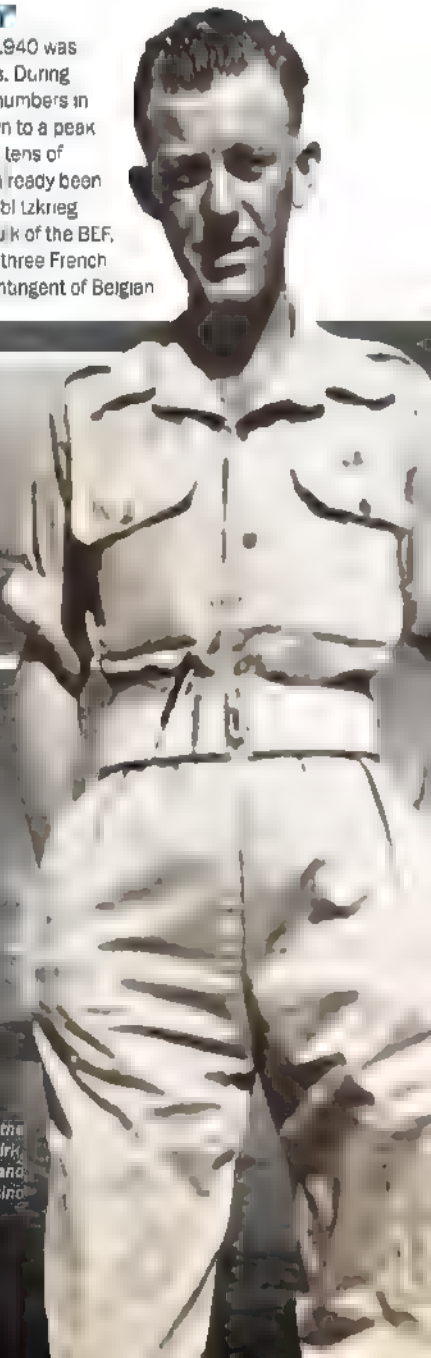
Garth Wright was evacuated on HMS Codrington, a ship that also rescued 4,636 other troops



**"WE WEREN'T PREPARED FOR THAT SORT OF WARFARE"**

The port of Dunkirk swelled in smoke as German bombing had started fires. Wright remembers seeing a red glow from a distance because of the fire

Right: Garth Wright pictured behind the lines in Tunisia in 1943-44. After Dunkirk, Wright took part in Operation Torch and fought at the Battle of Monte Cassino





# CUT OFF FROM RESCUE

A huge part of the BEF remained in France to support the French Army after Operation Dynamo & suffered the consequences

*Long rows of British and French prisoners-of-war assemble at Dunkirk around 4 June 1940. For them, Operation Dynamo came too late*



Although the evacuation from Dunkirk was indeed a remarkable achievement, it has often been forgotten that tens of thousands of soldiers were left behind as the rescue ships made for Britain. As well as those killed, around 41,000 were reported missing or captured, with a significant proportion of those being two brigades of the 51st Highland Division.

Commanded by Major General Victor Fortune, the division had been in France since January 1940 and was stationed at the Ouvrage Hackenberg fortress in Lorraine on the Maginot Line. Consequently, the Highlanders escaped the subsequent encirclement of the BEF, but it also hindered their escape from France.

The division was attached to the French Tenth Army and pulled back to a new line along the River Somme, where it was heavily attacked in the days after Operation Dynamo was completed on 4 June. Between 5–8 June the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders suffered some of the worst casualties in the regiment's history. However, they, and the majority of 164th Brigade, were able to escape from Le Havre during Operation Cycle. Other brigades of the division were not so lucky.

Over 10,000 men of 162nd and 163rd Brigades became trapped with French troops at Saint-Valéry-en-Caux on the Normandy coast and were forced to surrender on 12 June. General Fortune became one of the most senior British officers to be captured during WWII and the defeat of the 51st Division was considered to be the end of Allied resistance during the brutal Battle of France.

Nevertheless, in a display of how tenacious the Highlanders could be, out of the 290 British POWs who successfully escaped home to Britain by June 1941, 134 were members of the brave 51st Highland Division.



*A soldier from the Cameron Highlanders looks through a periscope in the Fort de Saligny on the Maginot Line, 3 November 1939*

**"THE DEFEAT OF THE 51ST DIVISION WAS CONSIDERED TO BE THE END OF ALLIED RESISTANCE DURING THE BATTLE OF FRANCE"**



**"IT WAS SO DAMN FRIGHTENING THAT I WAS BEGINNING TO WISH THAT THE NEXT ATTACK WOULD BE MY LAST. I THOUGHT 'I'M NOT GOING TO GET OUT OF THIS SO LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH'."**

*The Withdrawal from Dunkirk, June 1940, by Charles Cundall. He was an official war artist and based his painting on photographs and eyewitness accounts.*



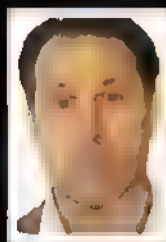




POWs being marched away from the beaches of Dunkirk to a German internment camp. These were the men who covered the Allied evacuation.

# THE MEN LEFT BEHIND

Military historian and author Sean Longden discusses the heroic rearguard actions that covered Operation Dynamo and the terrible conditions that Allied soldiers endured in captivity



## HOW IMPORTANT WERE THE REARGUARD ACTIONS FOR THE SUCCESS OF OPERATION DYNAMO?

They were absolutely vital: without the rearguard the evacuation just couldn't have happened. All the way through the retreat from Belgium and northern France there

were well-organised defensive lines such as rivers and canals. Individual units continually retreated and defended and that was essential in stalling the German advance.

Holding at places like Mont des Cats and Cassel were important, particularly because of the importance of high ground in what is an incredibly flat landscape. It's perfect defensive countryside and criss-crossed with canals and drainage ditches. The proof of that is when you look at what happened to the German garrison at Dunkirk in 1944-45: they were just bypassed. The British made the decision to just besiege Dunkirk and not to try and attack the town. That tells you a lot about why the Germans didn't choose to finish off the British in 1940.

## HOW DID THE 51ST HIGHLAND DIVISION BECOME DETACHED FROM THE BEF BEFORE IT WAS SUBSEQUENTLY STRANDED IN FRANCE AFTER THE EVACUATION?

It's often talked about the willing 'sacrifice' of the division, but quite simply the reason they got stuck in France is that they're not part of the main retreat and evacuation. At the time of the German attack they were serving further south alongside the French in the Maginot Line. When the attack comes in they were geographically not there. Their withdrawal is on a line heading west: they're not withdrawing to the northwest like everyone else so when the Germans cut the British off they are south of that line.

I interviewed veterans from the 51st and they weren't aware of what was going on elsewhere; all they knew about was what was going on in their zone. They knew things were bad and that there was a retreat but they didn't have form or understanding outside of their own area. By the time the 51st engaged again the evacuation was pretty much over; but they fought on and sacrificed in the same way as everyone else did.

## DID SOME ALLIED SOLDIERS MANAGE TO EVADE CAPTURE AFTER DUNKIRK?

Whole units were cut off and a lot of people headed along the coast to find fishing vessels to see if they could sail home. That became increasingly difficult once the Germans were fully in occupation but some people did manage it.

There were large numbers of men who walked across country and kept hiding. Others went and lived in villages and waited before getting false documents. If they could get into Vichy France things became a lot easier. Some went off to the US embassy in Paris and the Americans would often help by supplying papers.

Crossing the Pyrenees into Spain was one route, but it wasn't that simple getting to Gibraltar because vast numbers of men ended up in camps in Spain, where they were very badly treated.

There was one British sergeant who managed to get to North Africa and then travelled down West Africa before arriving at a British garrison. He turned up, explained his situation and said, "Here I am, I'm reporting for duty. I was left in France and have walked down half of Africa!"

It's hard to verify but certainly more than hundreds managed to escape. In February 1941, a report reached London from Belgium suggesting that there was possibly up to 1,000 British soldiers hiding in villages around Brussels. In April 1941, 13 Belgians were tried for harbouring British troops. There was another figure of 5,000 believed to be hiding in the Pas-de-Calais. There was a complete mix of stories from that period.

## WHAT WERE CONDITIONS LIKE FOR NEWLY CAPTURED POWS?

Of all the people I have interviewed about being captured that year every one had a bad time to varying degrees. I've never met anyone who said, "It was absolutely fine." For a start they had to deal with the shock of being captured. A lot of them had nothing; they had lost their kit and might not even have water bottles, mess tins, cutlery or blankets.

There were no efforts made to help these men; they went into captivity with what they had. Many ended up marching 20-30 miles a day, so those who did have kit soon abandoned it.

Exhaustion was the main thing. If anyone stepped out of line they were beaten by the German guards in large numbers. Men who did try to escape or

even just ran off to a pump or horse troughs to get some water were shot. Virtually everybody that I interviewed about going into captivity had memories of people just being shot for disobeying the Germans. It was utterly awful for them.

Also, it was an incredibly long period to be in captivity. In that initial period they had no idea whether the British were completely defeated or how long the war would last - they were completely cut off from the world.

Although many eventually made the best of their situation the mental scars of their captivity were very significant. I don't think any POW, no matter how long or short their captivity is, escapes without being mentally scarred.

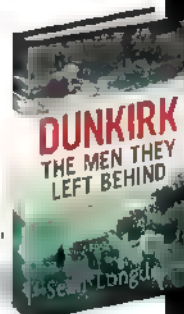
## WHY DO YOU THINK THE SUFFERINGS OF THE MEN LEFT BEHIND HAVE BEEN LARGELY FORGOTTEN?

In 1940 the story of those left behind just did not fit the brief. Right from the beginning it was necessary to celebrate the evacuation because the future for the British was based on that escape. For the people left behind it was really unfortunate that the necessities of the time meant that all the publicity had to go on turning what was an awful defeat into some measure of victory.

Afterwards there were some fantastic memoirs that came out but they weren't necessarily the most successful. It was very difficult for people to talk honestly and openly about how awful their experiences had been. For instance, I don't think the publishing world in 1950 wanted to know the depths of what those men went through. If you had presented the truth at that time they just couldn't have handled it.

## DUNKIRK: THE MEN THEY LEFT BEHIND

Sean Longden is the author of *Dunkirk: The Men They Left Behind*. Published by Constable & Robinson, the book is available to buy on Amazon at: [www.amazon.co.uk/Dunkirk-Men-They-Left-Behind](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Dunkirk-Men-They-Left-Behind)





forces now converged on the defensive perimeter set up around the port.

Dunkirk was the longest uninterrupted beach in that sector of the Channel coast and the largest port with suitable facilities to aid a final evacuation by sea. It was also located in a marshy area that could potentially aid its defence. Courageous defensive actions were fought at Calais and Boulogne among other places in order to buy valuable time for the evacuation preparations.

Astonishingly, Adolf Hitler refused requests for the Luftwaffe to completely destroy the Allies at Dunkirk and halted ground attacks for around 48 hours. This gave the British valuable time to proceed properly with the evacuation, which was code named 'Operation Dynamo'. Between 26 May and 4 June 1940, hundreds of thousands of troops waited on the beaches to be evacuated. However, as a member of the Royal Artillery, Wright still had defensive duties to carry out.

"We went into Dunkirk and kept on the move giving what cover we could for the evacuation. We had to keep on the move all the time, keeping mobile up and down the beaches, getting into action and trying to give Jerry as much as he was giving us. We didn't do a bad job."

As a trained motorcyclist, Wright had to take over his dead friend's duties

**"THEY TOOK ME DOWN THE LOCAL PUB AND I FELT AWFUL. I FELT LIKE A COWARD BECAUSE OLD BOYS FROM WWI WERE BUYING ME DRINKS AS IF I WAS SOME SORT OF HERO"**

"When Ken (Stephens) was killed he was the despatch rider and we had no other riders around, so I took over the job keeping in touch with the outlying guns. I did that for 48 hours or so between what we had for a headquarters in Dunkirk to the outlying guns around Bray Dunes."

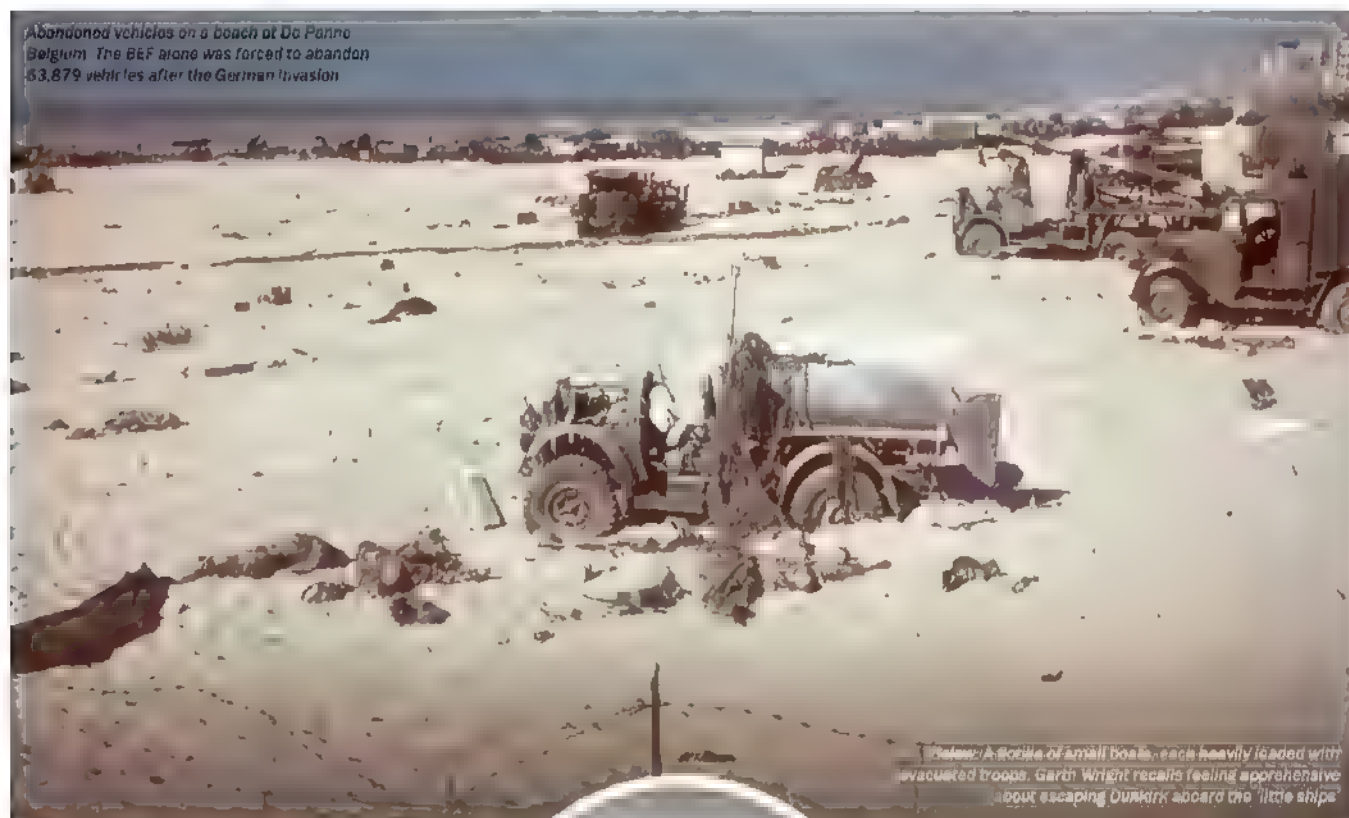
During these motorcycle missions Wright came under fire from a German sniper. "I used to have to go along the canal and you could only get 49 miles per hour out of the old thing. I used to head down and just pray because a sniper had a go at me twice and once hit the frame of the bike. The bullet pinged and glanced off and I could see it on the frame. It was one of my more worrying moments of the war."

After around two days performing despatch-riding duties Wright spent a day on Dunkirk beach sheltering among the sand dunes. Conditions were horrendous. "It was hell on Earth on the beach itself, dug out my slit trench with my helmet. The Germans timed bombing attacks every half hour. They would come over strafing with Me109s and bomb us with Stukas. You could set your watch on the tick of every half hour through daylight hours. Nothing happened at night but as soon as dawn broke, until sunset, they were over. It was so damn frightening that I was beginning to wish that the next attack would be my last. I thought, 'I'm not going to get out of this so let's get this over with.' I honestly felt that way – it was terrifying."

Although he was theoretically highly exposed on the beach Wright believes it may have helped save his life. "A lot of the bombs went into the soft sand and the blast went upwards, whereas if it landed on something solid the blast spread. Dunkirk beach was, in one way, a blessing to us because most of the blast went upwards."

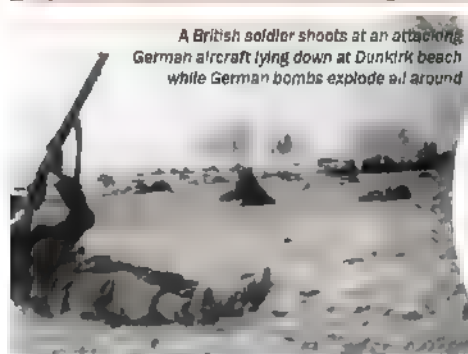
### Evacuation

Dunkirk became famous for the civilian 'little ships' that evacuated the troops. Hundreds of privately owned vessels took part in Operation Dynamo, but Wright remembers feeling cautious about the



Abandoned vehicles on a beach at De Panne, Belgium. The BEF alone was forced to abandon 53,879 vehicles after the German invasion.

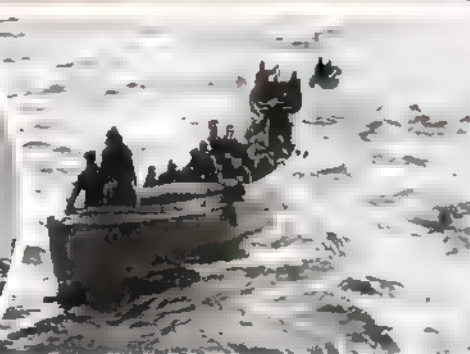
Below: A scene of small boats, each heavily loaded with evacuated troops. Garth Wright recalls feeling apprehensive about escaping Dunkirk aboard the 'little ships'.



A British soldier shoots at an attacking German aircraft lying down at Dunkirk beach while German bombs explode all around.



French destroyer FR Bourrasque sinking after hitting a mine on the way back from Dunkirk. Approximately 1,200 men were onboard and many died.



possibility of boarding them. "There were great queues for the little boats and I thought, "I'm not going out and waiting for that." I just stayed in my trench and waited. I picked the right deal – think but quite a lot got away with the little ships."

Eventually, amid the explosions, Wright was given an opportunity to get out.

"They shouted for volunteer stretcher-bearers. They say don't volunteer for anything but I'm damn glad I volunteered for this one! I got up – anything rather than just sitting there waiting to be the next one to be picked off. Me and another guy picked up what was left of this poor (wounded) lad and took him out along the Mole."

"East Mole" comprised a long stone and concrete jetty running out from Dunkirk's harbour entrance with another wooden platform extending out to sea. It was around 0.7 miles in length and the point of evacuation for more than two-thirds (approximately 200,000) of those rescued in 1940. By the time Wright approached the jetty

it had already been under heavy attack from the merciless Luftwaffe.

"(The Mole) had been badly bombed but repaired as much as they could so you could still get access to the destroyer lying off there – HMS Codrington. We took this boy aboard the Codrington and put him down but I don't think he lived long. I went to go back to the silt trench but the captain told me to stay on board. I didn't argue too much with him and I had a first-class trip from Dunkirk to Dover. I consider myself damn lucky that I got away."

HMS Codrington was an A-Class destroyer and had a ready-seen service during the Norwegian Campaign only weeks earlier. She was transferred to Dover Command for Operation Dynamo on 27 May, and between 28 May and 2 June the ship evacuated 4,538 troops over seven trips from Dunkirk, including Wright. Unlike most of the other destroyers involved in the evacuation, HMS Codrington was spared major damage despite

sustained air attacks and was able to continue support duties after Dynamo was completed on 4 June.

### A costly 'miracle'

The evacuation of Dunkirk was a remarkable piece of military improvisation. It had initially been estimated that only 45,000 troops could be rescued in two days but in the event over 338,000 soldiers were successfully evacuated in an operation lasting nine days. Of these men 221,504 belonged to the BEF and a further 122,000 were mostly French or Belgian. The sheer number of troops that escaped meant that Britain could fight on and the boost to national morale was considerable. However, it should never be forgotten that Operation Dynamo was the result of a colossal Allied defeat. The human cost alone during the Battle of France was huge. British casualties amounted to 66,426, with 11,000 killed, 14,000 wounded and over 41,000 reported

**"IT SHOULD NEVER BE FORGOTTEN THAT OPERATION DYNAMO WAS THE RESULT OF A COLOSSAL ALLIED DEFEAT. THE HUMAN COST ALONE DURING THE BATTLE OF FRANCE WAS HUGE"**





missing or captured. Belgian casualties were 23,350, while the French suffered a staggering 90,000 killed, 200,000 wounded and 1.8 million soldiers captured. The material costs for the BEF were also severe, with the equipment lost including 63,879 vehicles, 20,548 motorcycles, 77,318 tons of ammunition and 423,630 tons of stores. 236 naval ships had been sunk or destroyed, and the RAF lost 177 aircraft in nine days. Hundreds more aeroplanes had already been lost during the Battle of France, and the frontline home strength of Fighter Command was reduced to 331 fighters, with only 36 left in reserve. This was a perilous situation for the imminent Battle of Britain.

The Germans had also suffered grievous casualties of 156,000, but the starkest fact remained that continental Western Europe had rapidly fallen to its knees in the face of a seemingly unstoppable German onslaught. Prime Minister Winston Churchill knew the situation was perilous and warned the House of Commons on 4 June,

"We must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory. Wars are not won by evacuations."

Once he was safely back in England, Wright was sent with the remainder of the artillery to Woolwich and given 24 hours' leave to visit relatives in Walthamstow. "They took me down the local pub and I felt awful. I felt like a coward because old boys from WWI were buying me drinks as if I was some sort of hero. Some had been gassed or were limbless and I felt like a coward that had run away. That was honestly my feelings; they were the people that I looked up to and I felt that I had run away and was a coward compared to them. But there you are, that's war."

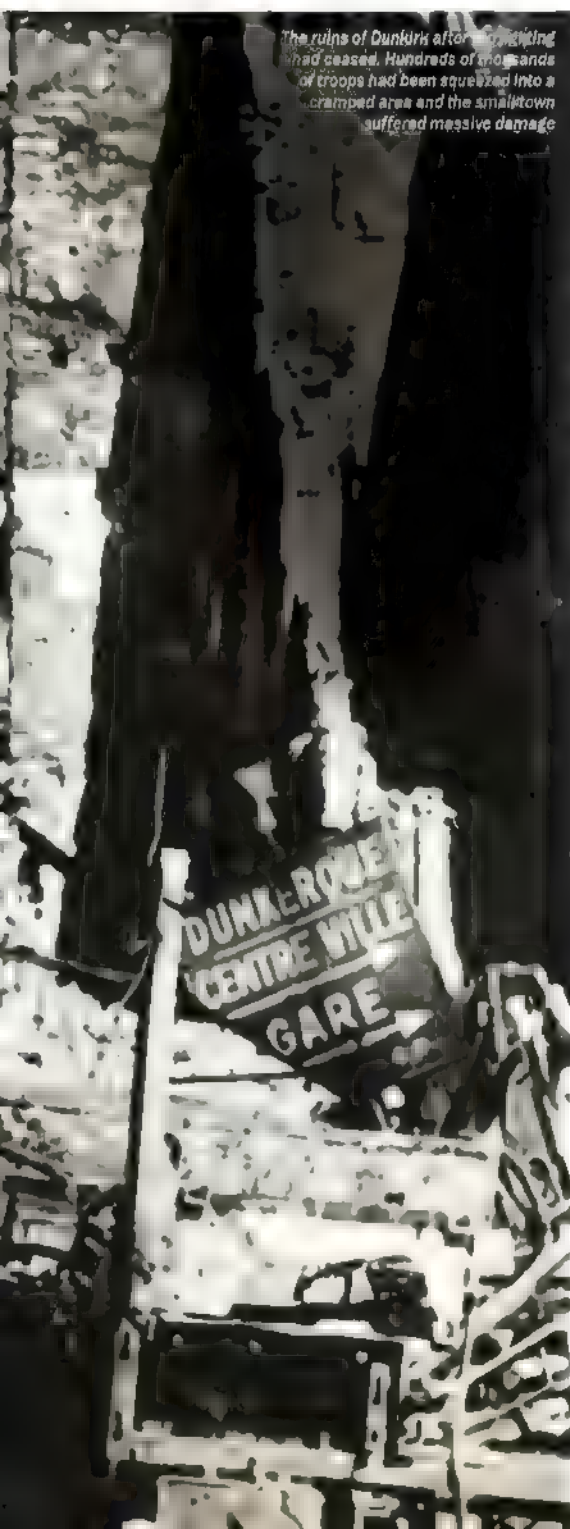
However, despite his experiences in France Wright does not blame his superiors for the Allied defeat. "We were all in the same boat, we just weren't ready for that type of warfare."

Wright would go on to serve during the Battle of Britain defending fighter airfields in southeast England and subsequently served in North Africa as part of Operation Torch. He then fought in the Italian Campaign at the Battle of Monte Cassino before ending his war advancing through northern

Italy into Austria. He had fought the Germans for the entire war but he is magnanimous towards his former enemy. "I had a sneaking regard for Jerry; the old Wehrmacht German soldier. The ordinary German was just the same as us, but the SS were a different crowd. They were nasty devils, but we had some funny ones too."

Dunkirk was a crucial moment of WWI and Churchill (who later marvelled at Hitler's failure to rout the British when he had the chance) tentatively recognised its importance on 4 June 1940 when he stated, "There was a victory in this deliverance, which should be noted." Soon afterwards the evacuation began to be referred to as a 'miracle' by the British people. It is a sentiment that Wright readily agrees with.

"I think it was – we came away to fight another day. It was only 338,000 of us that got away but it was the nucleus of the British Army. There's a TV programme now called *SS-GB* whose plot is that the Germans had indeed overrun us and what it would have been like here (in Britain). It's pretty gory, the way they just lift up a girl and shoot her in the head. I think that's the sort of life that we would have had if it wasn't for the miracle of Dunkirk."



The ruins of Dunkirk after the evacuation had ceased. Hundreds of thousands of troops had been squashed into a cramped area and the small town suffered massive damage

British soldiers dive to the ground at Dunkirk beach while under attack. Garth Wright recalls the sand would send the bomb blast upwards



Above: A wounded French soldier being taken ashore on a stretcher at Dover after his evacuation



Above right: Exhausted British troops aboard a train, having returned home from Dunkirk. Wright recalls feeling "awful" after his evacuation

## ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

Garth Wright is a member and beneficiary of the Royal British Legion, the United Kingdom's largest Armed Forces charity. It upholds the memory of the fallen and provides lifelong support for the Armed Forces community including serving men and women, veterans and their families. For further information about the Legion, its services and how to get involved visit: [www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)



**"THE WORST DISASTER IN BRITISH HISTORY"**

# THE FALL OF SINGAPORE

**SINGAPORE 8-15 FEBRUARY 1942**

WORDS TOM GARNER

Certain that their island fort could never be taken, British high command was stunned when the Japanese Army seized control of Singapore in 1942, inflicting a humiliating defeat and capturing thousands of POWs. Among them was 21-year-old Bob Hucklesby

**O**n 11 February 1942, American journalist Yates McDaniel wrote a final report to his newspaper from a formerly grand outpost in the Far East. "The sky over Singapore is black with the smoke of a dozen huge fires this morning as I write my last message from this once beautiful, prosperous and peaceful city. The roar and crash of cannonade and the bursting bombs that are shaking my typewriter and my hands, which are wet with perspiration, tell me that the war that started nine weeks ago, 645 kilometres [400 miles] away, is today in the outskirts of this shaken bastion of empire."

McDaniel would escape the carnage that overwhelmed Singapore, but for many others the

devastating assault on this vital part of the British Empire meant death or years of savage captivity and trauma.

The Fall of Singapore was a triumph for Japan and was almost certainly Britain's gravest setback in WWII. More than 80,000 Allied prisoners were captured in a mass surrender against a numerically inferior Japanese force. A shocked Winston Churchill described the humiliation as, "...the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history".

The road that led to these momentous events was paved with a combination of Japanese daring and deeply entrenched British complacency and incompetence. The end result would be a hammer blow to European Imperialism and a brutality on

the part of the Japanese that equalled the craven behaviour of their Nazi allies.

## **'The Gibraltar of the East'**

Located at the southern end of the Malay Peninsula, the island of Singapore had been a British Crown colony since 1867. It was considered a vital part of the British Empire and its major military base was thought to be impregnable. It was known as the 'Gibraltar of the East' or 'the key to the Pacific', and the British had spent 20 years building a highly expensive naval base. Costing an eye-watering £80 million (around £2 billion today), it was completed in 1938 and was protected by 15-inch guns. However, the idea that Singapore was an 'island fortress' was false.



A member of the Second Australian Imperial Force (AIF) stands guard over a potential invasion point



Japanese soldiers advancing through the Malayan Peninsula. The British did not expect the Japanese to attack through jungles and swamps



Below: British soldiers of the Suffolk Regiment are held at gunpoint by Japanese infantry. They would be condemned to years of cruel captivity



**"THE IDEA THAT SINGAPORE WAS AN 'ISLAND FORTRESS' WAS FALSE, AS ONLY THE SOUTH WAS HEAVILY DEFENDED, BUT IT WAS AN ILLUSION THAT EVERYONE BELIEVED"**

as only the south was heavily defended, but it was an illusion that everyone believed. This included the Japanese.

Japan was subject to a crippling trade embargo from Western powers due to its military campaigns in China and was forced to look for alternative resources. Oil was particularly needed and the most accessible supply was in Borneo, which was then part of the Dutch East Indies. However, the fields could only be obtained through conquest and Singapore was directly in the way of Japanese plans to also take Malaya and the Philippines. They knew that the British and Americans both had powerful naval presences in the Pacific, so Japanese military planners devised a combined offensive against American forces in the Philippines and Pearl Harbor and the British in Hong Kong and Singapore.

On 7 December 1941, Pearl Harbor was attacked, and Hong Kong and Singapore followed almost immediately afterwards. By 9 December, the Royal Air Force (RAF) had lost nearly all of its frontline aircraft when the Japanese attacked

RAF airfields in Singapore. This effectively neutralised any aerial support for the army on the island before a major assault had even begun. Yet, worse was still to come the following day.

As a strategically important base, Singapore had a strong naval presence that was dominated by the new battleship HMS Prince of Wales and cruiser HMS Repulse. The two ships left Singapore to sail north up the Malay coast, where the Japanese were landing their invasion force. However, on 10 December they were both sunk by Japanese torpedo bombers. Their loss stunned Churchill, "In all the war I never received a more direct shock. There were no British or American capital ships in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific except American survivors of Pearl Harbor, who were hastening back to California. Over this vast expanse of waters, Japan was supreme and we were weak."

Churchill was right to be highly concerned, Hong Kong had fallen on 25 December with 10,000 prisoners taken. The only force now guarding Singapore and Malaya was the 86,000-90,000-strong army led by Lieutenant General Arthur Percival. The numerical strength of the British, Indian, Malayan, Australian and New Zealand troops should have been a comfort, but many of the soldiers had never seen combat, which contrasted sharply with the battle-hardened Japanese forces, which had been at war since the invasion of China in July 1937.

### Blitzkrieg in Malaya

Although the British knew that Singapore was an obvious target for the Japanese, the high command was confident that any attack would be driven off.

British soldiers were also told that the Japanese were poor soldiers whose success against the Chinese troops was down to them being even

worse at fighting. This was proved to be untrue after the fall of Hong Kong and the Japanese invasion of Malaya.

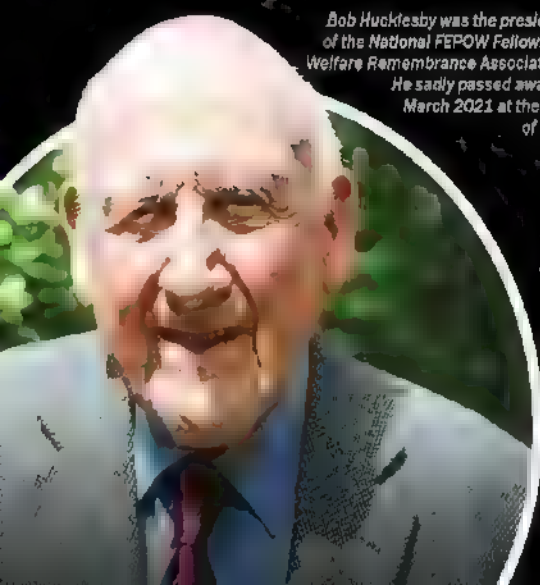
Under the command of Lieutenant General Tomoyuki Yamashita, the Japanese Army swept through the peninsula and any thoughts about a conventional war were soon shattered. The Japanese used speed, surprise and ferocity to ensure that the British never had time to regroup. At the Battle of Jitra between 11-13 December, the British were forced to retreat and left behind a huge stock of supplies, including 100 artillery pieces and machine guns as well as 300 trucks and armoured cars. The Japanese then swiftly continued advancing, with most of the soldiers using bicycles as transport.

It was through this rapid march that the Allies became exposed to Japanese brutality. Soldiers were ordered not to take prisoners, and an official pamphlet stated, "When you encounter an enemy after landing, think of yourself as an avenger coming face to face at last with his father's murderer. Here is a man whose death will lighten your heart."

Captured Allied soldiers were killed, including some Australians who were shot then doused with petrol and set on fire. Many local civilians who assisted the Allies were tortured before being murdered. Such atrocities were shockingly unfamiliar to the Allies and the Japanese movements surprised the British. It had been confidently presumed that the Japanese would attack Singapore by sea, because the jungle and swamps of the Malay Peninsula would be too difficult to traverse. This complacency was exposed when the Japanese captured Malayan capital Kuala Lumpur on 11 January 1942.

Ever since the invasion force landed in Malaya, the British had been attacked from behind, and the Allied army now withdrew across the

Bob Hucklesby was the president of the National FEPOW Fellowship Welfare Remembrance Association. He sadly passed away in March 2021 at the age of 100



causeway over the Johor Strait that separated Singapore from Malaya. The island would pay host to the final stand between the two empires.

### Shut into prison

Sailing into this turbulent situation was a young British soldier called Bob Hucklesby. Born in 1921, Hucklesby was a sapper in the Royal Engineers and had served in the armed forces from the outset. "I was conscripted and joined the army in May 1939. When I was called up, I put my uniform on and went off with a kitbag. I didn't know what was going to happen. War broke out on 3 September and we were on a route march passing through part of Norwich. A lady came rushing out of her home and said, 'You're doing it for real now.'"

As a sapper, Hucklesby worked on a compressor truck and was also trained in explosives. For the first two years of the war he served as part of the Home Forces in Britain, but towards the end of 1941 he was preparing to go abroad to serve in the Middle East when his transport ship was diverted.

"Everything was scheduled in to go to Basra and we were in khaki drill and pith helmets etc, which was not the sort of thing for the jungle. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, we were a few days out of Cape Town. The decision was then made to send the whole division to Bombay."

While he was in India, Hucklesby had to adjust to the hot climate. "The reason we went to Bombay was to acclimatise because we had been at sea for almost three months. We had a fortnight of acclimatisation in India and my field company was at Deorali (Doolally). It was a hot spot and I can understand where the phrase, 'Gone Doolally' came from. Then we took off and arrived at Singapore on 29 January 1942."

Before he arrived on the island, Hucklesby's knowledge of his Japanese opponents was minimal. "We knew very little. In my opinion, the British should have taken note of what had already happened in China. We heard a lot about that afterwards because I met up with people in the navy who had been on gunboats on the Yangtze River. They used to tell me that every morning they [saw] dead bodies floating down the river, so we ought to have known."

Hucklesby consequently came in for a direct shock when he docked at Singapore on 29 January 1942. "When we arrived on the quayside there were civilians queuing to get off, so we realised that things were serious."

Two days after Hucklesby's arrival, Percival's entire force of British and Commonwealth troops withdrew across the 366 yard causeway over the Strait of Johore onto Singapore Island – the causeway was subsequently blown up to prevent the Japanese from crossing. Almost 100,000 Allied soldiers were now based on Singapore, compared to Yamashita's approaching army of 30,000. Between 8–9 February, 23,000 Japanese troops crossed the straits in landing craft. To their amazement they were largely unopposed.

Australians were among the first to see combat, and their performance was mixed. Some simply dropped their rifles and ran, but others fought the Japanese to a standstill at a base near Johore Bahru. At the Kranji depot, the Australians incinerated many attackers by setting oil tanks alight, and the Japanese Imperial Guard beheaded 200 wounded prisoners in a vengeful retaliation.

At 4.30 a.m. on 9 February, an order to withdraw was accidentally given by the British high

Hucklesby fled from half a dozen oil and ammunition dumps in Singapore during the last days of the battle.



## "WHEN WE ARRIVED ON THE QUAYSIDE THERE WERE CIVILIANS QUEUING TO GET OFF, SO WE REALISED THAT THINGS WERE SERIOUS"

command, which proved to be a costly mistake as the main line of the Allied defence now began to rapidly collapse. This deteriorating situation was disorientating for Hucklesby, who was forced to adjust quickly to his new circumstances.

"It was a totally different environment to what we'd been used to. I remember being on guard in our tented camp which was located in a rubber plantation. With the trees in line, whichever way you looked it made it difficult not to see a Japanese coming in from behind because we knew they were on the island."

Hucklesby was stationed on the coast and he put his engineering skills to work.

"I used my compressor and cut two channels a good distance apart in a reinforced concrete jetty. I laid a charge down each channel and blew it up. It was far enough apart so that you could jump from one side to the other. It was meant to be a deterrent for the Japanese to [not] use that concrete pier as a means of landing."

After preparations were complete, Hucklesby prepared to fight the invaders.

"Not long after that, there were no particular duties for sappers in the Royal Engineers so we became infantry. My section was ranged along a monsoon drain opposite a playing field, because it was thought that the Japanese had broken through the first line and they would have an advantage if

they came across this field. It was also used by a herd of cows too, so that made it very difficult."

Although Hucklesby's section did not see combat, they came under direct attack by Japanese bombers.

"We were in that situation for about three days and used to see the Japanese air force go over on a regular basis because there was nothing to stop them. There was no Allied air force at Singapore because it was vacated to Java, so the Japanese could drop bombs and do whatever they wanted. I recall seeing a Tamil or an Indian in his white robes walking around in a circle and then you'd see a bomb drop. These bombs would blow up people, but thankfully they missed us."

Despite the bombardment, Hucklesby felt secure in his position. "We thought we were reasonably safe in this rather deep monsoon drain. It was comforting in a way."

### A growing disaster

Hucklesby's situation was one that was being repeated thousands of times across the island. Not only was there no effective air defence, the British were paying the price for years of complacency and poor military planning. Shortly before the Japanese attack, the new British commander-in-chief of all forces in the Far East, General Archibald





General Yamashita (seated right back, demands an unconditional surrender from General Percival (seated right, front). The confident pose of the Japanese belies the fact that they were outnumbered and low on ammunition



## THE RABBIT VERSUS THE TIGER

The opposing commanders at Singapore were both personally courageous, but the battle would ultimately be won by the man who possessed the most imagination and charisma

### Arthur Percival (1887–1966)

Percival has gone down in history as a failure for surrendering at Singapore, but he had known successes in his career prior to 1942, as well as controversies. He had joined the British Army as a private in 1914 and was commissioned within a month. By 1917, he was colonel in command of a front-line battalion. Percival was also highly decorated and was awarded a Military Cross, Distinguished Service Order and Croix de Guerre. He was described by his commanding officer as "very brave and gallant".

Between 1920–22, Percival served in counter-insurgency operations in Ireland, where his men earned a reputation of brutality towards the IRA. When war broke out again in 1939, he commanded 43rd Division and was evacuated from Dunkirk before being sent to command British forces in Malaya.

Although he had a strong general combat record, Percival's experience was confined to Western Europe, making him ill prepared for the Far East. He was also somewhat timid and was nicknamed 'Rabbit' because of his prominent front teeth. These factors, combined with the serious tactical mistakes he made, reduced morale and aided defeat at Singapore. After he was released from Japanese captivity in 1945, Percival witnessed the surrender of Japan aboard USS Missouri, but when he left the army he was denied the knighthood that usually accompanied a winning general.

Left: Within months of his arrival in Malaya Percival would oversee a huge capitulation to numerically inferior forces.

### Tomoyuki Yamashita (1885–1946)

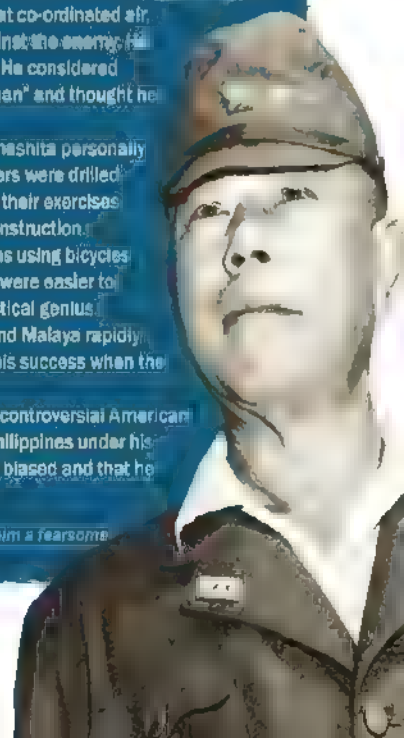
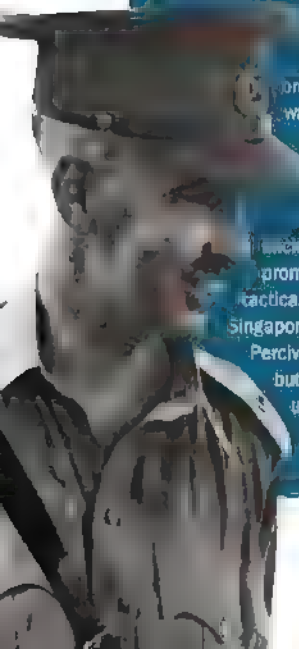
Yamashita was nicknamed 'The Tiger' for his strict, aggressive approach. Graduating as an army officer in 1906, he was a lieutenant general by 1937 and gained combat experience leading troops in China during the late 1930s.

Yamashita was sent to Germany in 1940 to study the Wehrmacht's methods and was impressed with blitzkrieg tactics that co-ordinated air, armour and infantry in lightning attacks against the enemy. He would later use them in his own campaigns. He considered Adolf Hitler to be, "...an unimpressive little man" and thought he looked like a clerk.

To prepare for the invasion of Malaya, Yamashita personally trained his troops in jungle conditions. Soldiers were drilled until they knew their roles to perfection, and their exercises included amphibious landings and bridge construction. Yamashita's most imaginative innovation was using bicycles instead of horses for transportation, as they were easier to maintain. It turned out to be a stroke of logistical genius. Because of these preparations, Singapore and Malaya rapidly fell. The Allies would not forgive Yamashita his success when the war ended.

In 1946, Yamashita was executed after a controversial American trial concerning Japanese atrocities in the Philippines under his command. Yamashita felt that the case was biased and that he was really being charged for losing the war.

Right: Yamashita's success during WWII earned him a fearsome moniker: 'The Beast of Bataan'.



Wavell, inspected Singapore and found that there were no defences on the north shore. Wavell sent Churchill an urgent report, and the Prime Minister later wrote of his surprise at the situation. "I must admit to being staggered by Wavell's telegram. The possibility of Singapore having no landward defences no more entered my mind than that of a battleship being launched without a bottom."

A rumour later circulated that the new guns at Singapore could not be turned northwards, but Hucklesby dispels that myth.

"Those big guns only had armour-piercing shells, they didn't have any that would spit. They could turn them around inland but they were no use because the shells were not good for that purpose. You can imagine how I feel when I think somebody should have realised that. I found this out years later and felt annoyed because it seemed to me that those who were there to advise hadn't really studied the situation."

It had initially been predicted that Singapore could hold out for at least three months. This would have been enough time for reinforcements to reach the island and make it too well defended for Yamashita to overcome. However, with the continuous air bombardments, nerves were beginning to fray. Singapore City, in particular, was suffering higher civilian casualties than soldiers in the field, and at the front Percival was becoming unnerved by the Japanese attack.

In reality Yamashita's offensive was on the verge of faltering. The Japanese were outnumbered three to one and were chronically short of fuel and ammunition. Senior officers argued that a major offensive against the British would ultimately fail, but Yamashita ignored this advice and decided to take a huge gamble. He ordered his artillery to shell the British as though his gunners had an endless supply of ammunition. Percival fell for the ruse. As an experienced WWI veteran, he thought that the renewed barrage was comparable to the artillery offensives of the Western Front. Like Yamashita,

he was also short on ammunition and limited his own gunners to 20 rounds per day. To compound the situation, Percival had also deployed his troops across the entire width of the island, resulting in his men being spread too thinly to concentrate en masse against the enemy, with disastrous results. There was fierce small-scale fighting along the Choa Chu Kang and Bukit Timah roads as well as numerous battles, including hand-to-hand fighting at Pasir Panjang, but in each case Allied troops were overwhelmed and driven back.

Despite this, the Japanese senior commanders were still urging Yamashita to reconsider his options. They continuously advised him to withdraw his forces to Malaya in order for them to resupply, ready to begin a fresh attack with more men and more ammunition. However, Yamashita literally stuck to his guns and gave the orders that the artillery barrage and advance against the Allies would continue. The last thing he wanted was to give the British a chance to recover, particularly when Churchill was unleashing his bulldog spirit.

### An empire dishonoured

The Prime Minister was aware of the deteriorating situation and sent a highly uncompromising cable to Wavell for fighting to continue. "There must be no thought of saving the troops or sparing the population. The battle must be fought to the bitter end at all costs. Commanders and senior officers should die with their troops. The honour of the British Empire and of the British Army is at stake. I rely on you to show no mercy or weakness in any form. The whole reputation of our country and our race is involved. It is expected that every unit will



Above: Having been freed from captivity, General Percival was placed directly behind Allied Supreme Commander Douglas MacArthur to witness the Japanese surrender aboard USS Missouri on 2 September 1945. Percival is the figure on the left behind MacArthur.

be brought into close contact with the enemy and fight it out."

Despite the sombre rhetoric from Churchill, Wavell and Percival thought differently. The ferocious nature of the Japanese offensive was overwhelming on a practical level, the water supply had almost been destroyed, and there was a high risk of an epidemic resulting from the many unburied dead in Singapore City. Wavell sent a message to Percival from Java on the morning of 15 February urging him to continue fighting, but he

**"THERE MUST BE NO THOUGHT OF SAVING THE TROOPS OR SPARING THE POPULATION. THE BATTLE MUST BE FOUGHT TO THE BITTER END AT ALL COSTS"**



A mother grieves over the loss of her child, who is lying dead beside her after a Japanese bombing raid. Tens of thousands of Singaporean civilians were killed.



# CONQUERING 'THE GIBRALTAR OF THE EAST'

The Fall of Singapore was sealed by incompetent British-led withdrawals and Japanese tactics that were both cunning and brutal

## 8-9 FEBRUARY

### Battle of Sarimbun Beach

Two Japanese divisions land in northwest Singapore, with Australian machine-gunners firing on the invaders. The 22nd Brigade takes the brunt of the attack from the Japanese and they are forced to withdraw.

## 11 FEBRUARY

### The Japanese advance

The Japanese 5th Division attacks British, Indian and Chinese troops along the Choa Chu Kang and Bukit Timah roads and forces them to retreat further inland.

## 7-8 FEBRUARY

### A deceptive manoeuvre

The Imperial Japanese Guards Division carries out a feint to the northeast of the island while shelling increases. Percival does not change his thinly spread positions despite the feint.

## 15 FEBRUARY

### Assessing the situation

Yamashita and his aides discuss if they should continue fighting or wait for the British to surrender, as the Japanese are low on ammunition and other supplies. The British are also running critically short of resources.

## 10 FEBRUARY

### The RAF departs

After two days of fighting, all but one of the RAF's airfields on Singapore are captured. The remaining aircraft are withdrawn to Sumatra, leaving only the army to defend the island.

## 15 FEBRUARY

### The British capitulate

A British surrender party arrives at Yamashita's headquarters at the Ford Motor Factory. After fractious negotiations, terms of surrender are signed at 6.10 p.m. and the guns fall silent at 8.30 p.m.

## 12-15 FEBRUARY

### Battle of Pasir Panjang

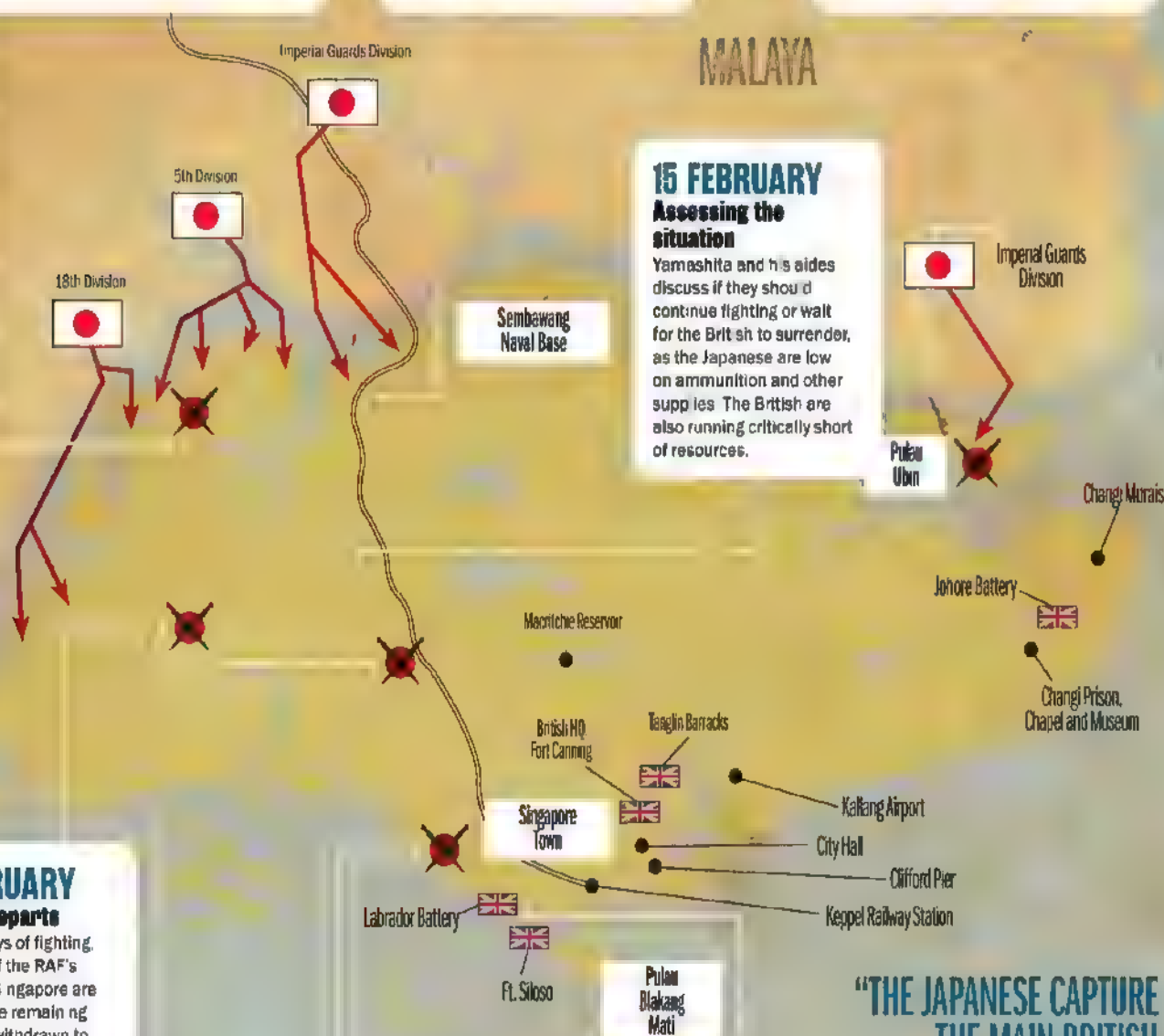
The Malay Regiment fights bravely against a Japanese attack along the Pasir Panjang Ridge on Singapore's southwest coast. There are heavy casualties and fierce hand-to-hand fighting before the Malay troops are finally overwhelmed.

## 14 FEBRUARY

### Hospital atrocity

The Japanese capture the main British ammunition dump at Alexandra Barracks before entering the nearby military hospital. They murder hundreds of wounded patients and staff.

**"THE JAPANESE CAPTURE THE MAIN BRITISH AMMUNITION DUMP AT ALEXANDRA BARRACKS BEFORE ENTERING THE NEARBY MILITARY HOSPITAL. THEY MURDER HUNDREDS OF WOUNDED PATIENTS AND STAFF"**



ended his communication saying, "When you are finally satisfied that this is no longer possible, I give you discretion to cease resistance. Before doing so, all arms, equipment and transport of value must, of course, be rendered useless."

Percival agreed and sent three officers to the Japanese headquarters to arrange a ceasefire. Yamashita agreed but he initially suspected a British deception. As the Japanese were greatly outnumbered, he feared that the Allies were buying time or trying to organise a Dunkirk-style evacuation. Neither was acceptable to Yamashita as he could no longer afford another big offensive. In an attempt to force Percival's hand, Yamashita invited him to surrender talks at the Ford Motor Company's assembly plant. The location was deliberate as it was the largest building on the island and could easily accommodate the large number of Japanese reporters, photographers and newsreel cameramen that Yamashita had assembled to record the occasion.

When Percival arrived at 6 p.m. for talks, Yamashita deliberately kept him waiting for almost an hour before demanding that the British unconditionally surrender immediately. Percival attempted to delay until the following day but Yamashita persisted and told his interpreter: "I want to hear nothing from him except yes or no." Faced with no choice, Percival accepted an unconditional surrender.

This was the defining moment of Yamashita's career. He had been informed that Singapore could hold out for 18 months and would require five divisions to overwhelm. Against the odds he had accomplished the island's conquest in a campaign lasting 70 days and with only three divisions. For the Allies, and particularly the British, it was a total humiliation, especially when Yamashita ordered the entire garrison to be paraded in front of his army and Japanese news photographers.

Away from the high-level negotiations Huckleby was still on alert when news reached him of the surrender: "After about four days we learned through a courier that the British had called it a day and capitulated (a word I don't like using). We got out of the trench, and when I took my boots off I discovered they were coloured white because I'd been in water for days. Then we made our way to a large house and I met up with others from the same field company that I was in. While I was there I thought, 'I'm not letting the Japanese use my compressor', so I got the tools out, took the head off one of the cylinders, removed the valves and threw them away so it couldn't be used."

"We hung about all day and then later on we were told where we had to line up on this road ready to march off to Changi."

### A bloody aftermath

The fight for Singapore had been a devastating encounter. The casualties of the battle itself were around 5,000 Allied and 4,485 Japanese dead and wounded. Nevertheless, worse was still to come. Japanese soldiers were already notorious for their brutality while on campaign, and now they inflicted their wrath on Singapore's civilians.

The military police rounded up tens of thousands of Chinese men as well as diverse members of the professional classes. They were taken out of town, shot and dumped in mass graves, with estimates of the dead ranging wildly between 5,000-100,000. Yamashita later claimed that he was unaware of the atrocities, but as he was nominally



British prisoners walking to the city of Changi following the surrender. Most would be marching into a dreadful captivity.

**"WHEN PERCIVAL ARRIVED AT 6PM FOR TALKS, YAMASHITA DELIBERATELY KEPT HIM WAITING FOR ALMOST AN HOUR BEFORE DEMANDING THAT THE BRITISH UNCONDITIONALLY SURRENDER IMMEDIATELY"**



General Arthur Percival (right) and another man march towards the Japanese headquarters to surrender. Singapore bearing the Union Flag and the white flag.





in charge of the island it is virtually impossible that he was ignorant of the massacres being committed by troops that answered to him.

Away from this horror, the Japanese, with no sense of irony, renamed Singapore 'Shonan' (Light of the South) and their victory allowed them to consolidate their conquest of the Dutch East Indies and so on. This gave Japan a vital lifeline.

The conquest effectively neutralised the British as a serious threat in the Pacific for a number of years, but the loss of prestige was arguably more damaging. 80,000 soldiers were captured, and the sheer number of prisoners was a surprise both to the Japanese and British.

"It wasn't long after becoming a prisoner of war and being without food for three days that we realised it was not going to be as short a stay as we originally thought. The Japanese decided that they had to do something with the vast numbers of prisoners. They didn't expect that number and we also didn't expect that number to be there. We had no idea how many Allied troops were on the island."

As one of the many thousands who were captured, Hucklesby felt that the British could have fought on but reflects that it was an unfortunate situation. "I don't think surrender was inevitable, but the British and the Allies were at a disadvantage from day one," he reflects. "It seemed to me that it was only towards the end when the Japanese got onto the island. If there hadn't been a capitulation there would have been

no drinking water for the thousands of natives who lived on the island. To me, giving up wasn't quite as definite because there were other reasons. Nevertheless, it was a hell of a blow."

Hucklesby believes that the blame for surrender lies solely with senior Allied commanders. "You've got to realise that Britain was involved in war on several fronts and Singapore and Hong Kong were a long way off. There was nothing that got in the way of the Japanese making it all the way down Malaya. They had a good foothold, and in my opinion it was too sudden and too late for the Allies to have taken that on board correctly and, with good advice, find a way to deal with that particular war. It was a huge strategic error."

In the immediate aftermath of the surrender, Hucklesby was angry at the decisions made by the Allied high command. "At the time I was disgusted. I felt that they hadn't taken the Japanese seriously enough for long enough. To give you some idea, I didn't apply for my medals until around 1965 because I didn't really want to wear them."

Nevertheless, Hucklesby is remarkably generous towards the man who most historians blame for the Fall of Singapore. "I never really blamed Percival because he was more of an administrator than a soldier and he should have been surrounded by the right advisors. He tried to compensate as much as he could because he got involved with Far East POWs when we got home. He didn't desert us and he could have done."



**"THE CONQUEST EFFECTIVELY NEUTRALISED THE BRITISH AS A SERIOUS THREAT IN THE PACIFIC FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS, BUT THE LOSS OF PRESTIGE WAS ARGUABLY MORE DAMAGING"**



Working on the Burma Railway. Despite being afflicted with multiple diseases, Bob Hucklesby was forced to work for the Japanese.

# HORROR IN CAPTIVITY

Bob Hucklesby joined thousands of other POWs in dreadful captivity and managed to survive the Burma Railway, Japanese brutality and terrible diseases

WWII has become synonymous with death and destruction on a scale never seen before or since. For most people, the sheer terror of the conflict is epitomised by the Holocaust and the mass implementation of industrial genocide. Nevertheless, the brutality of the war took many different forms across the world and the conduct of the Japanese in the Pacific equalled Germany and the Soviet Union for their appalling treatment of those who opposed them. It is estimated that between 3-14 million people may have been murdered by the Japanese military and government through massacres, human experimentation, starvation and forced labour.

Thousands of these victims were Allied prisoners of war, many of whom were part of the 80,000 men captured at Singapore. For three and half years, these soldiers faced unimaginable conditions: disease, violence, malnutrition and death were everyday facts of life. Bob Hucklesby was one of many who endured this nightmare and survived. His story is a sobering reminder that war can bring out the worst, but also the best, in humanity.

## Captivity in Singapore

In the initial aftermath of the surrender at Singapore, Hucklesby quickly realised that he would have to make himself useful. "I was in the camp and was told that the Japanese were looking for working parties and carpenters because they had come across the Royal Engineers. I realised from the little

I'd seen that the Asians cut wood by pulling saws, and planes towards them instead of pushing. I immediately thought, "We're all at square one here", so I volunteered as a carpenter. That took me down to Singapore where we built frames for warehouses for them to store their loot."

While he was en route, Hucklesby witnessed the reality of Japanese savagery. "On the way down, we marched down a street and there on six bamboo poles were the heads of Chinese people. They'd been slaughtered. Also, walking alongside me was a Japanese soldier and there was a yapping dog so he fixed his bayonet and charged it through the belly, so I knew we were in for a tough time. It was a shock."

Hucklesby spent the first six months of his captivity on the island, and in all the years of his captivity he recalls that he only ever met a handful of Japanese soldiers who treated him with decency. Two of these men were stationed in Singapore. "One said in sign language that he sold hats in a shop and, in his own way, tried to tell me he was a Christian," Hucklesby remembers. "The other one was a young fellow who looked rather simple and he came back from a day off in Singapore and brought me some sweets. Other than those two, there was only one other soldier that I remember was reasonable."

In an experience that was all too common for POWs, Hucklesby soon fell foul of the Japanese and experienced mistreatment inflicted almost at random. "While I was down, there was another

soldier who didn't like the sight of me. He pulled me out, gave me a log and I had to stand there with this log above my head. I watched him all the time and, fortunately for me, it was near his lunchtime so when he went for his lunch, I immediately dropped the log and disappeared into another working party so that he couldn't find me. I was holding the log for about three quarters of an hour, which wasn't too long. It wasn't long enough for him to come back and have a go at me with his bayonet."

Hucklesby discovered that he had to develop new methods in order to survive. "It was important to get streetwise very early. You didn't stand still, you just kept walking or you always did an act and pretended to be doing something."

Although he could fend off Japanese violence to a certain extent, Hucklesby could not escape the disease that was rampaging through prisoner camps. "It was during this period that malnutrition started to catch up with me. It was helped by having terrible dysentery. I got to the stage where I couldn't read because people passed books around to each other in the hut and I was worried. I was told that what I needed was palm oil that contained Vitamin A. I still had a few Singapore dollars left so I got someone to go under the wire and get me some palm oil and that stopped it getting worse."

Despite the passage of more than 70 years, Hucklesby continues to suffer from the effects of his wartime illnesses. "I still can't read for very long, I couldn't read a book. I can read papers because the

**"COMRADESHIP BETWEEN PRISONERS IS MORE INTENSE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE"**





A prisoner of war during the construction of the Thai-Burma Railway. Hucklesby's appearance would have been similar to this man upon his liberation in 1945

articles aren't that long." Dysentery was not the only disease he had to contend with. "Not only did I have dysentery, but in Thailand I had malaria every 10-12 weeks and then from the malnutrition I had wet and dry beriberi, pellagra, scabies and ringworm. You're looking at a very fortunate person."

### The Burma Railway

In early 1943, Hucklesby and thousands of other prisoners were removed from Singapore and transported up to Thailand to work on the construction of the Thai-Burma Railway. This notorious track was the Japanese Army's logistical plan to transport soldiers and supplies from Bangkok to Burma. 61,000 POWs were forced to work on the line along with as many as 250,000 native workers. The railway was 261 miles long and was constructed in just over a year.

It is estimated that between 13,000-16,000 POWs died working on it, with one man dying for every sleeper that was laid. Between 90,000-100,000 natives also died, and it was in this horrific situation that Hucklesby found himself.

"I went up to Thailand and landed at the railhead (that was at Ban Pong. From there we took off and walked through the jungle and stopped at two plots. One was to help another working party and then we carried on. I was on the camp at Canyu 3, which was the section of laying the base of the railway. There were three camps and mine was in the one that was highest up. It was here that the malaria and dysentery got me down."

Hucklesby was already a very sick man but he was still expected to work. "A working party included 120 men, 100 of who had to go out. The other 20 were either sick or worked in the camp preparing the food and keeping the place clean.

"It got to the stage where I couldn't really walk and I used to be carried out for three or four days. I would be sat next to a fire and it would be my job to

## "ALTHOUGH HE COULD FEND OFF JAPANESE VIOLENCE TO A CERTAIN EXTENT, HUCKLESBY COULD NOT ESCAPE THE DISEASE THAT WAS RAMPAGING THROUGH PRISONER CAMPS"

keep the fire going and to boil the water for people to drink."

During his captivity Hucklesby began to lose his sense of time and focused on simply getting through each day. "Days and months don't mean a thing because you haven't got any way of registering it. You just know that next morning you've woken up."

Despite his illnesses he also still had to keep one step ahead of the Japanese. "You had to be very streetwise and be on the move. Even if a Japanese soldier was 55-60 metres away, you still stopped and bowed because otherwise he'd come for you and either hit you with the butt of his rifle or with his foot. You realised that you had a different environment to adapt to. Those that didn't, suffered. They either wouldn't stop or they'd try and argue with the guards. A lot of those that didn't adapt didn't come home."

In the end, Hucklesby knew that the best way to survive mistreatment was to lay low. "Ultimately you could tell that they were soldiers and came from this brutal regime and that it was best to bide your time and leave things as they were."

Hucklesby is clear that his captors were seemingly motivated by violence. "It was part of their culture. Not only were the Japanese brutal but so were the Koreans. With this brutal regime, the emperor and the ordinary people didn't have a chance. After the war, the Japanese realised that they needed America to put them back on their feet and it would help if they became more Westernised."

Despite this appalling treatment, Hucklesby was able to survive thanks to his fellow prisoners. "Comradeship between prisoners is more intense than anywhere else. What you needed was three of you mucking in together. The Aussies called them 'muckers' and we called them 'mates'. You didn't need to be friends, you just needed to have that feeling that someone else is there to look after you. You needed three because it wasn't possible for one to always be there."

This arrangement had great practical benefits. "They would look after you when you had malaria, get you water, help you to drink and do other things for you. They would clean you up when you had dysentery and boil you water when you weren't well. The bonus was that they would share the food that you didn't eat. The intensity of that comradeship has lasted. It doesn't disappear."

Despite this mutual co-operation, it wasn't always enough to help prisoners survive because the Japanese deliberately withheld aid. The result was that POWs needlessly died. "It only needed the Japanese to say, 'We will provide a basic standard of first aid or medication' and a lot of this wouldn't have happened. They didn't even let the Red Cross provide it either. I shared two parcels in my time. One was for 17 of us and the other was for 11. If they could do it twice, there was no reason it couldn't have been done more often. I also heard that they did receive parcels but they used them for themselves. I don't think we got all of them and it makes me feel annoyed because a lot of my friends would still be here otherwise."

Hucklesby feels very lucky to have survived his experiences and has never forgotten his comrades. "Because I was so fortunate, one of the things I

needed to do was to never forget those who were left behind and I've been involved with the Far East Prisoner of War Association since 1950."

### Liberation and recovery

Throughout his ordeal, Hucklesby had no idea how the war was progressing. "I didn't know a thing. I didn't even know when it was over. The first thing we knew that the situation was changing was when I could hear an airplane in the distance in daylight. The noise got closer and closer and then I could see the markings on the plane and they were of the RAF. It flew over the camp and the airman in this Dakota opened the door and waved."

Hucklesby has always remembered that moment. "It was marvellous and I thought, 'I've made it.' You can understand how fortunate I was just to live. The aircraft then turned around and waved again to tell us to clear the central roadway down the camp and they dropped provisions. It was something I shall never forget."

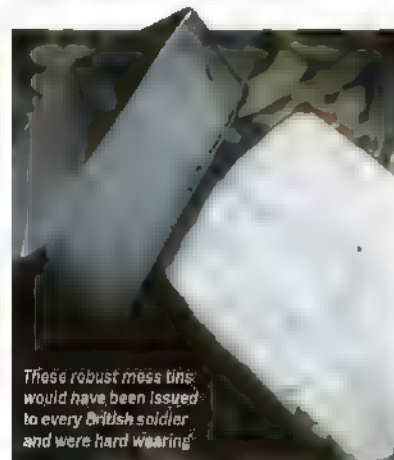
It transpired that Hucklesby's camp had been liberated days after the Japanese surrender. "That plane came over on 28 August 1945, which was 13

## BASICS OF LIFE

### Bob Hucklesby's survival in Japanese prisoner of war camps owed much to two simple aluminium tins

The tins had originally belonged to Private L Wootton of the Sherwood Foresters. Wootton had died of cholera in another camp before they arrived in the hospital of the camp where Hucklesby was held. He was at least the third owner of the tins.

Hucklesby used the small tin for boiled water and the larger one for food. Meals were extremely basic. Rice was issued three times a day with an evening vegetable stew. Meat was eaten once a fortnight. The tins were Hucklesby's most valuable possessions from July 1943 until his liberation. He later donated them to the Sherwood Foresters Regimental Museum in Nottingham Castle.



These robust mess tins would have been issued to every British soldier and were hard wearing

days after the end of the war but we didn't know. It only made sense to me later because within a day an officer and his driver came into the camp in a Jeep and I thought, 'How did he get as near as this?' but of course he would have already known that the war was over and he must have been waiting nearby."

During this euphoria, the POWs' tormentors made a discreet exit. "The Japanese just disappeared. We didn't see them anymore, which was sensible because I'm certain we would have taken revenge so long as it didn't hurt us."

Freedom came just in time for Hucklesby, who was still extremely ill when he was freed. "About a fortnight before the camp liberation, I had washed myself in a pond that had been created out of water from monsoon period. That was silly of me because I got a bug or something in my ears and I couldn't open my jaw. The only thing I could do was eat my rice through my teeth."

His condition was so bad that he was almost skeletal in appearance. "I weighed about seven and half stone, I was all ribs of course. I was in a very poor condition at the end. You could

tell because I was one of the first to leave the camp when arrangements were made to transport us out."

Even then, his ordeal wasn't quite over. "I was taken to the railhead and put on a cattle truck and went on my way to Bangkok, but I couldn't go all the way because the rail bridge across the river had been blown. I had two options: I could walk across on a plank or I could wait until there was a barge to take me across. I looked at that plank and the river and thought, 'I'm not doing that.' So I waited. When I got on the barge, I was taken down to Bangkok and I think I spent about four days sleeping on the floor of a house while arrangements were made."

Hucklesby was flown to a Burmese hospital where he received proper medical attention for the first time in years. The effects of his captivity were very apparent. "At Rangoon there were people to meet us. I was in this hospital and it was really jammed full. I remember that a nurse took my arm and guided me to a marquee, sat me down and made me a cup of tea with sugar in it. I couldn't drink it because I hadn't had sugar for three and a half years." He was also able to send a communication back to Britain. "Lady Mountbatten came round and we were all told we could send a message home and so I was able to tell my parents that I was alive."

After ten days, Hucklesby was transferred to a hospital ship for reassessment, where his

## "HIS CONDITION WAS SO BAD THAT HE WAS ALMOST SKELETAL IN APPEARANCE"

condition surprised medical staff. "The doctor said to me, 'Why is your skin that colour?', and I told him it was because I had had pellagra. None of them had ever seen it before, so I stripped off and walked up and down these tables so they could all see what it was like."

From this point, Hucklesby's condition improved and he was able to recover in comfort in India. "I was sent to a hospital up in the hills where I was treated very well. I could eat what I wanted, when I wanted and I had medicine. I must have been there for about three weeks. I then had a bed on a hospital train - which was very nice because the bed was at window level - and was taken to Poona. It was wonderful because I could sit there and see the scenery."

While he was recovering at Poona, Hucklesby was informed that he was now well enough to fly home. "I said 'Have I got an option?' and they said yes. I said I didn't want people to see me as I was and I'd rather come home on a hospital ship from Bombay. I learned afterwards that it was an international order from the Red Cross that we should have those options." As a result, Hucklesby didn't return home until 19 November 1945 when he docked at Southampton. "When I saw those white cliffs at the Isle of Wight I said to myself, 'You're not leaving Britain again.' I realised that I was fortunate and ought to take advantage of that."

### Remembrance

Hucklesby has always been aware of how lucky he was to survive his captivity and it has informed his outlook ever since. "There have been two things that I've always considered since coming home. One of the things you mustn't do after being that fortunate is to not put yourself under pressure because it is not everything in life. The other thing is, that it's important if you want respect to give other people respect. In the back of my mind I'm always grateful."

Hucklesby is now the president of the National FEPOW (Far East Prisoner of War) Fellowship Welfare Remembrance Association and took part in the commemorations for the 70th anniversary of VJ Day in 2015. At a service at Saint Martin-in-the-Fields Church in Central London, he met Queen Elizabeth II, and the monarch's presence was greatly appreciated. "She was very nice. We had a bit of a chat. I said 'Thank you ma'am for coming to our service' and she looked me straight in the face and said 'I wanted to come.' The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh had asked to be there. It wasn't an official event, the BBC and others hadn't responded beforehand, so I was grateful to her. That made all the difference because the BBC got involved and the Royal British Legion made a better showing than they would have done had she not been there."

Today, Hucklesby is modest about how he would like people to remember the Far East prisoners of war. "Just give that person respect. I had to go to hospital recently and one of the staff realised I was a POW and came across to shake my hand. I don't want any more than that. It means a lot because it meant that someone else knew that there were prisoners of war and that so many didn't return. I'd like people to remember that they've got a stone in their memory thousands of miles away."

Below: Allied POWs shortly after their liberation near Yokohama, Japan, August 1945. Their gaunt appearances are testament to the malnourishment that was common in Japanese prisoner camps



N.F.F.W.R.A



## NATIONAL FEPOW FELLOWSHIP WELFARE REMEMBRANCE ASSOCIATION

**NFFWRA is the national association providing practical help and assistance to former FEPOWs (Far East Prisoners of War and civilian internees) and their wives and widows**

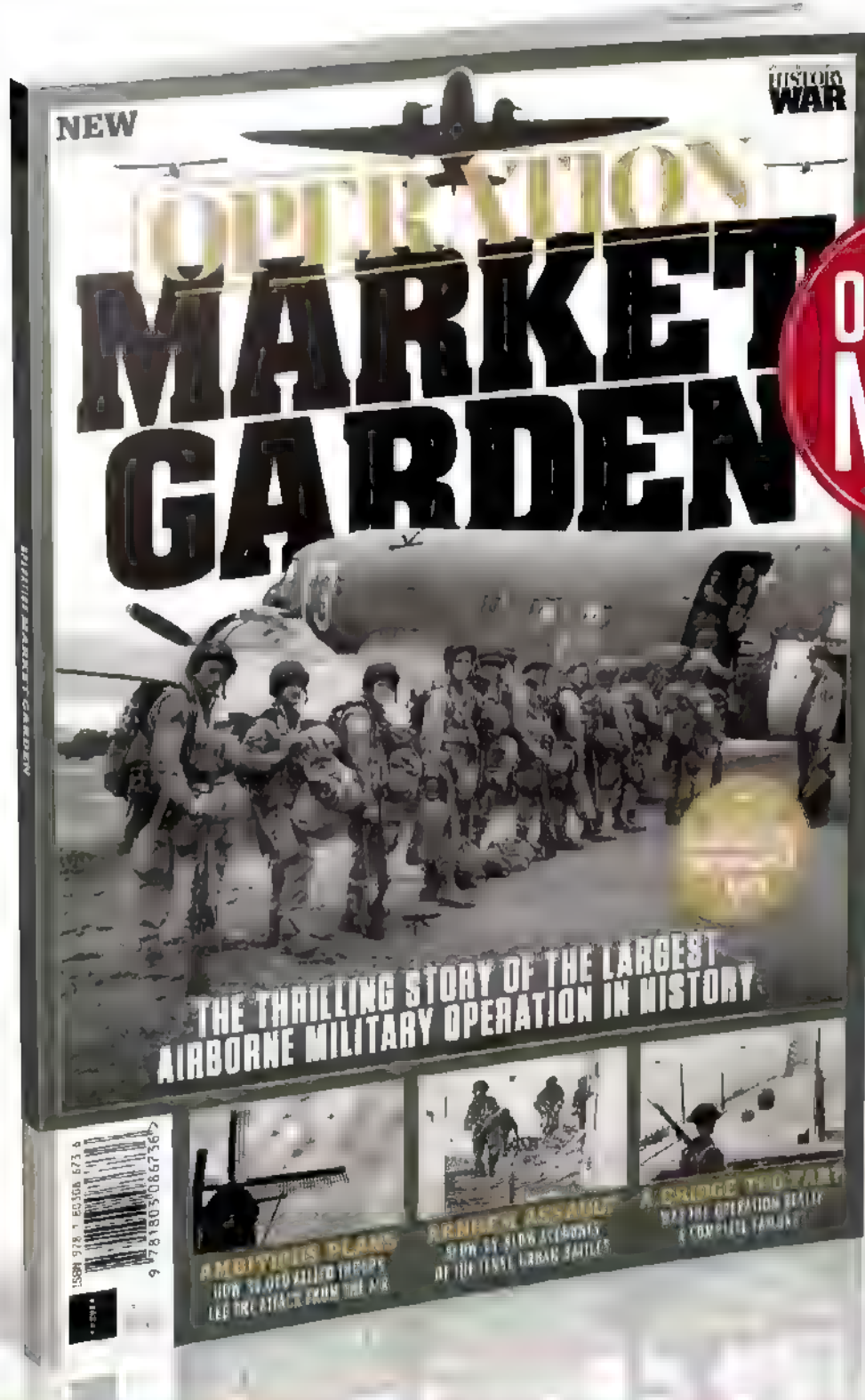
The association can help with arranging home adaptations and mobility equipment for former FEPOWs and financial payments for hospital stays, nursing homes and transportation for reunions.

Reunion events are held biannually, with the next one being a three-night reunion to be held at Gunton Hall, Lowestoft, from Saturday 13 to Monday 15 May 2023. This will include a service held in Wyomondham at the only church in the world dedicated to the memory of FEPOWs. For more information visit [www.nationalfepowfellowship.org.uk](http://www.nationalfepowfellowship.org.uk) or contact [enquires@nationalfepowfellowship.org.uk](mailto:enquires@nationalfepowfellowship.org.uk)



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# OPERATION MARKET GARDEN

THE NETHERLANDS, 17-25 SEPTEMBER 1944

For over seven decades the underlying reasons for the failure at Arnhem went largely unremarked upon, despite being in plain sight

WORDS WILLIAM F BUCKINGHAM





**T**he Battle of Normandy effectively ended on 21 August 1944 with the closing of the Falaise Gap. 75 days after Allied troops first set foot on the D-Day landing beaches, the battle cost the Germans around 10,000 dead and 50,000 prisoners along with almost all their heavy equipment and vehicles, and an estimated tide of 20,000 survivors fled eastward as far as southern Holland, where the local civilians dubbed Tuesday 5 September 'Dolle Dinsdag' or 'Mad Tuesday'.

The Allied pursuit began on 28 August with British tanks reaching Arras on 1 September. Brussels was liberated two days later, and by 6 September the advance was approaching the Dutch border in the face of stiffening German resistance. In an effort to maintain the momentum, Allied Supreme Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower authorised Operation Market Garden, which was intended to bypass the Westwall fixed defences guarding the German frontier and open a route into the North German Plain and thus the heart of the Third Reich.

Operation Market was the largest airborne operation in history and involved landing 40,000 men from three Allied airborne divisions along a 60-mile corridor running north from the Belgian border to the Dutch city of Arnhem on the Lower Rhine, men tasked with seizing and holding 17 bridges across eight separate waterways starting at the Wilhelmina Canal just north of Eindhoven. The operation began on 17 September 1944 with the U.S. 101st Airborne Division assigned to secure the southern third of the corridor; the centre portion, including the city of Nijmegen, was the responsibility of the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division, and the furthest third was allotted to the British 1st Airborne Division.

The ground component of the operation, codenamed 'Garden', tasked British 30 Corps – spearheaded by the Guards Armoured Division – to break through the coalescing German defence on the Belgian border and advance rapidly up the airborne corridor, relieving each crossing in turn. All this was scheduled to take 48 hours. In the event, the two U.S. airborne divisions secured all their allotted

objectives, although the first bridge across the Wilhelmina Canal was destroyed, prompting a 36-hour delay compounded by the tardy performance of 30 Corps, while the road and rail bridges across the River Waal at Nijmegen were not secured until the evening of 20 September, 24 hours behind schedule.

Matters went most awry at Arnhem, however, despite a near flawless delivery. The 1st Airborne Division's plan was to despatch the 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron and the 1st Parachute Brigade to secure the objectives in Arnhem. The bulk of the first lift would remain at the landing area until the second lift arrived on the following day, after which the entire division would move as one into Arnhem.

As it turned out, only a small part of the 1st Parachute Brigade managed to slip through to the north end of the Arnhem road bridge, where they had the objective for 80 rather than 48 hours before being overwhelmed after an epic siege. The remainder of the 1st Parachute Brigade fought itself to destruction trying to reach the bridge before being driven back to the main body of the 1st Airborne Division, which was blocked and surrounded at Oosterbeek, midway between the landing area and Arnhem.

After another epic six-day siege that reduced Oosterbeek to rubble and the failure of three attempts to push reinforcements across the Lower Rhine, around 2,500 survivors were evacuated in small boats on the night of 25–26 September 1944. The evacuation effectively marked the end of Operation Market Garden.

### Popular reasons for the failure

The search for reasons for the 1st Airborne Division's failure at Arnhem began as soon as Market Garden ended, and several recurring favourites have emerged over the years. These include landing the division in daylight; spreading the division landing across three lifts on successive days; and the seven-mile or so distance between the landing area and Arnhem. All of these were mandated by external factors, however, and they did not impact adversely on how events unfolded at Arnhem.

First, because Market Garden was launched in a no-moon period, a daylight insertion was unavoidable because paratroopers and glider pilots alike required a degree of natural light in order to judge depth and distance for landing. It should also be noted that Market Garden's first lift was widely hailed as the most successful to date by experienced commanders from all three airborne divisions.

Second, the 1st Airborne was not alone in being delivered in multiple lifts spread over several days simply because there were insufficient transport aircraft available to deliver three complete airborne divisions simultaneously. The shortening autumn days ruled out flying more than one lift per day because it would involve taking off or returning in darkness, and while RAF aircrew were trained in night flying and navigation techniques, their JSAAF counterparts largely were not and also lacked trained navigators and ground crew.

Third, the landing area was selected because it was the closest site to Arnhem suitable for large-scale glider landings, as contemporary maps show. While the area at the south end of the Arnhem road bridge could have been used as a parachute landing zone, the planners considered it too soft and riven with deep, wide drainage ditches for safe use by heavily laden gliders. Furthermore, the distance between the



landing area and the objectives in Arnhem was not the handicap it is often painted as. The 2nd Parachute Battalion reached the Arnhem road bridge in just over four hours, fighting several small actions en route and while shepherding a number of personnel and vehicles from the brigade column and a variety of support units. This shows covering the seven miles was perfectly feasible providing the attackers moved with sufficient speed and application.

### The myth of enemy action

Enemy action is another often-repeated reason for the failure, usually relying on two specific examples. SS Battalion Krafft, an approximately 400-strong replacement training unit billeted near Oosterbeek, is routinely credited with single-handedly holding back the 1st Parachute Brigade's advance to Arnhem until after dark on 17 September, largely due to a highly embellished and self-serving report by its commander, Hauptsturmführer Sepp Krafft.

The reality was in fact rather more prosaic. Krafft serendipitously deployed his unit along the eastern side of what was to be the 1st Airborne Division's main landing area in a bid to avoid Allied preparatory bombing, but its impact was far less important than popularly claimed, amounting to a handful of relatively minor clashes.

One element was wiped out by the 2nd Parachute Battalion after straying onto the landing area; another spent several hours inconclusively skirmishing with a British unit defending the landing area; and a third caught two of the 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron's Jeeps as they belatedly began their move from the landing area to the Arnhem bridge.

The most significant clashes were with the 3rd Parachute Battalion on the outskirts of Oosterbeek consisting of a brief hit-and-run ambush in the late

afternoon followed by an inconclusive two-hour fight with the far end of the 3rd Battalion column at dusk that ended when the SS element withdrew. None of this materially impacted the 1st Parachute Brigade's advance toward Arnhem, however, and any connected consequences were attributable to other factors.

The second popular myth with reference to enemy action is the recurring idea that the 1st Airborne Division landed atop two fully functioning panzer divisions. While II SS Panzerkorps – consisting of 9 and 10 SS Panzer Divisions, had been in the vicinity of Arnhem since 8 September, the fighting in Normandy and the retreat across northern France and Belgium had reduced them to a fraction of a single division in total, with a relative handful of vehicles and heavy equipment, the bulk of which were despatched south to Belgium to block the Allied ground advance on 13 September, four days before Market commenced.

By 17 September, 10 SS Panzer Division had been ordered to refit in place in Holland at three locations up to 30 miles east and north of Arnhem while 9 SS Panzer Division had been ordered to hand over its surviving heavy equipment to its running mate, and the bulk of its personnel had already been despatched to Germany by rail to be re-equipped by the time Market began.

The remainder, mainly service and supply personnel denuded of almost all heavy equipment and motor transport, were scattered across locations north and east of Arnhem between 16 and 35 miles from the landing area.

It is therefore clear that neither of II SS Panzerkorps' badly depleted formations were close to being under the 1st Airborne Division's landing and more importantly none of 9 SS Panzer Division's elements were located between the landing area and Arnhem. They were therefore unable to seriously

interfere with the 1st Parachute Brigade's advance into Arnhem in the first vital ten to 12 hours following the landing, when the British formation's battle for its objectives was ultimately won and lost.

Apart from the riverside loophole that permitted the 2nd Parachute Battalion to slip through to the Arnhem road bridge, German reactions and deployments were exemplary; however, II SS Panzerkorps HQ issued warning orders less than an hour after receiving reports of the landing; 9 SS Panzer Division's denuded units were on the way to the scene of the action within three hours; and within four hours Feldmarschall Walter Model had issued orders that framed the subsequent successful German conduct of the battle.

### Unwarranted arrogance and poor discipline?

All this suggests that the reasons for the 1st Airborne Division's failure at Arnhem were a little closer to home, and at first glance the problem appears to be with the division's attitude as a whole. Although the glider and parachute operations carried out by two of its constituent brigades in Sicily were effectively fiascos, the 1st Airborne Division returned from the Mediterranean in November 1943 with an overwhelming sense of its experience and capabilities, tendencies noted not least by the division's new commander, Major General Robert Crquhart, who observed a reluctance to accept the need for extra training.

Similarly, Lieutenant Colonel Mark Henniker from the division's Royal Engineer contingent referred to many surrounding themselves with a mystique that was not entirely justified by experience, while Major Philip Tower, who joined the division after its return to Britain, recognised the quality of his new airborne comrades but felt they overestimated their abilities and noted an unwillingness to acknowledge that any worthwhile experience was to be had outside the airborne fold. This is illustrated by an incident



British paratroops of the 1st Airborne Division in their aircraft en route to Arnhem.



At the time, Market Garden was the largest airborne operation in history.

An Allied paratrooper makes an uncomfortable landing.







Dutch citizens welcome a British Sherman tank on 21 September

when umpires ruled against a particularly poorly coordinated attack by a 1st Airborne Division unit during Exercise Mush in April 1944, after which a company commander protested loudly that "you can't do this to us, we are the original Red Devils."

The attitude manifested itself as indiscipline in the lower ranks, particularly within the 1st Parachute Brigade. Lieutenant-Colonel John Frost, who commanded the 2nd Parachute Battalion at Arnhem bridge, referred to low-level disciplinary problems across the whole brigade, from "hard cases" disinclined to obey regulations to widespread absenteeism that interfered with training and disrupted unit cohesion, while the commander of the 3rd Parachute Battalion was relieved after his battalion was unable to march on a test exercise.

The epicentre of indiscipline was the 1st Parachute Battalion, where one commander was posted away after tightening discipline with the aid of a Guards RSM, which the troops considered to be "treating battle-hardened men like children" and his replacement was not popular either. The feeling was mutual. Lieutenant-Colonel Kenneth Darling





later recalled, "Frankly, I was horrified by 1 Para, they thought they knew all the answers, which they did not, and their discipline was not what I expected." The upshot was a mutiny on 30 March 1944, when the battalion refused to draw parachutes for a jump, which led to Darling being dismissed and replaced by Lieutenant Colonel David Dobie, who led the 1st Battalion into Arnhem.

In some instances the indiscipline spilled over into outright criminality. For example, on 12 February 1944 the local fire brigade had to be summoned after a smoke marker was ignited outside the Battalion Orderly Room, and just over a month later the safe in the battalion's NAAFI canteen was broken into and the funds stolen.

The obvious conclusion to draw from all this was that unwarranted arrogance and poor discipline were the reasons for the 1st Airborne Division's failure. However, events in Holland clearly show this was not the case. With regard to the 1st Parachute Brigade, the 2nd Parachute Battalion reached the Arnhem road bridge in just over four hours accompanied by the brigade column and other elements totaling approximately 740 men.

This force held the north end of the bridge for three and a half days, losing 81 dead and approximately 280 wounded in the process; almost 50 per cent of the force. They were only overwhelmed after running out of ammunition and food and being literally blasted out of mostly burning buildings by artillery and tanks.

The 1st Parachute Battalion spent 11 hours trying to reach its objective north of Arnhem, losing 11 dead and over 100 wounded before moving immediately to reinforce Frost at the road bridge. It then joined the 3rd Parachute Battalion in repeated unsuccessful attempts to break through the German blocking line in the western outskirts of Arnhem, during which both units fought themselves virtually to destruction.

By midday on Tuesday 19 September the 1st Parachute Battalion had been reduced to around

200 men from the 548 who had jumped in two days earlier, while the 588-strong 3rd Parachute Battalion had been reduced to just 60.

Neither was this a level of raw courage and application unique to the 1st Parachute Brigade, as the fight in the outskirts of Arnhem took a similar toll on battalions from the 1st Airlanding Brigade and 4th Parachute Brigade and was then replicated across the entire gamut of the 1st Airborne Division's units in the subsequent six-day siege of Oosterbeek.

This all strongly suggests that the 1st Parachute Brigade's indiscipline was largely a case of good field soldiers making for poor garrison soldiers and that there was in fact little wrong with the 1st Airborne Division up to the battalion level or equivalent, arrogance notwithstanding.

### Poor planning and leadership

In fact, the root of the 1st Airborne Division's failure was higher up the chain of command. In fact it was at the very top. A regular officer commissioned in 1920, Major General Robert Elliot Urquhart assumed command of the 1st Airborne Division on 10 January 1944 having risen from the rank of major to major general in the course of war service in a variety of staff positions, including a 13-month stint on the staff of the 51st Highland Division while it was stationed in North Africa. This was followed by his sole operational command appointment – four months commanding 231st Infantry Brigade on the island of Sicily and in southern Italy. He had never commanded or served with an airborne unit prior to assuming command of the 1st Airborne Division.

His relatively rapid progress and elevation to the latter command over better-qualified candidates was due to the intervention of Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery. Urquhart had been a Montgomery protégé since coming to the latter's notice when serving on the 3rd Infantry Division staff in October 1940, and he was given command of the 1st Airborne

Division after Montgomery raised the idea with the commander of British 1st Airborne Corps Major-General Frederick Browning. To be fair there is no evidence Urquhart sought the appointment, and he created a good impression at his new command, but circumstances conspired to prevent him properly grasping the operational implications, restrictions and realities of his new role.

In the five months before D-Day Urquhart attended numerous conferences and planning meetings in or near London over 100 miles from his HQ in Lincolnshire, and after the invasion he was fully involved in preparing for a total of 15 cancelled operations. This was a punishing schedule, stress that was compounded by a bout of malaria that hospitalised him for almost a month in April 1944.

Urquhart's lack of airborne experience was clearly apparent in his planning for Arnhem, which elicited disbelief among senior U.S. airborne commanders. For example, Brigadier General James Gavin, commanding the 82nd Airborne Division and the most experienced of all Allied airborne commanders, later likened Urquhart's scheme to a peacetime exercise.

Urquhart gave assembling his division its entirety as much attention as accomplishing its mission, and his assumption that the Germans would permit it to sit in place for 24 hours before moving into Arnhem was fanciful, as the fact that the bulk of the 1st Airborne Division covered less than half the distance to Arnhem before being blocked and surrounded shows. Urquhart's thinking appears to have been rooted in conventional ground operations rather than what was required for an airborne insertion 60 miles behind enemy lines and thus suggests a fundamental misunderstanding of the realities of airborne operations. Urquhart compounded his unrealistic planning with a series of poor decisions after Market was launched, to the extent it can be argued he did not make a single correct decision in his first two days on the ground in Holland.

Lieutenant General Lewis H. Brereton (left), commander of the First Allied Airborne Army shakes hands with Major General Urquhart





## “URQUHART’S LACK OF AIRBORNE EXPERIENCE WAS CLEARLY APPARENT IN HIS PLANNING FOR ARNHEM, WHICH ELICITED DISBELIEF AMONG SENIOR U.S. AIRBORNE COMMANDERS”

He failed to clarify the division command succession until boarding the glider for Arnhem, a basic precaution and a vital one in airborne operations, given the routine risks inherent in aerial delivery even without enemy action. In the event, his chief of staff was obliged to mitigate the consequences with diplomacy in the midst of the battle when Urquhart abruptly left his HQ shortly after landing in response to an erroneous rumour that the 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron had failed to arrive in Holland.

Instead of remaining calm and checking the veracity of the rumour, Urquhart immediately summoned the squadron commander, Major Freddie Gough, to Division HQ by radio before racing off in a Jeep to inform Brigadier Lathbury and the 1st Parachute Brigade in person. This panicked, kneejerk summons from Urquhart had the effect of separating Major Gough from his command for the remainder of the battle and effectively ended the squadron’s coup-de-main mission.

More seriously, it can be argued that at this point Urquhart effectively abdicated command of the 1st Airborne Division as he disappeared with no explanation or contact arrangements and then deliberately severed radio contact with his HQ, which was never re-established. His arrival at the 3rd Parachute Battalion at dusk was instrumental in that unit abandoning its move to Arnhem and halting in Oosterbeek for the night. Urquhart then chose to remain with the 3rd Battalion, remaining out of contact with his HQ and the rest of the division and thus unable to exert any influence on the developing battle until the late afternoon of 18 September. He then made an ill-adviced attempt to regain his HQ accompanied by Brigadier Gerald Lathbury that ended with Lathbury being badly wounded and captured and Urquhart trapped in an attic for 12 hours before finally regaining his HQ at 7:25 a.m. on 19 September after a 40-hour absence. By that time the initial window of opportunity had gone and the Arnhem portion of Operation Market had effectively failed.

That is not to say that Urquhart was a bad or incompetent commander. He did a more than adequate job of rallying his division and establishing a defensible perimeter at Oosterbeek while in contact with the enemy, and he then orchestrated the defence of that perimeter under ever-increasing German pressure. When it became clear this was unsustainable and permission was granted to withdraw across the river, Urquhart planned and implemented an evacuation inspired by the retreat from Gallipoli during WWI codenamed Operation Berlin, which succeeded in lifting over 2,000 men across the Lower Rhine on the night of 25–26 September. All that came after the airborne assault at Arnhem had morphed into a conventional defensive infantry battle, however, and the evidence strongly suggests that Urquhart did not fully grasp the realities of airborne operations. That lack of understanding contributed significantly to the failure of the 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem and, by extension, to the failure of Operation Market Garden.

The Arnhem portion of Market might still have succeeded in spite of Urquhart’s errors had the 1st Parachute Brigade managed to seize and hold the objectives in the city. This was not to be, however, as the brigade commander was only marginally more experienced himself. Brigadier Gerald Lathbury was commissioned in 1926 and his war service consisted



of a number of separate staff appointments at the War Office interspersed with eight months overseeing the raising of the 3rd Parachute Battalion and four months performing the same role with the 3rd Parachute Brigade.

He assumed command of the 1st Parachute Brigade on 25 April 1943 and led its operation to seize the Primasole Bridge in Sicily three months later. The operation was a fiasco as the brigade was scattered up to 20 miles from its objective, the ground force took 48 rather than 12 hours to arrive, and Lathbury was wounded in the back and legs during the fighting. These circumstances have concealed the unsuitability of Lathbury's plan, however, which employed six widely separated landing zones before dispersing the brigade over three separate locations spread across more than five square miles. This ruled out mutual support and breached the military maxim on maintaining focus on the primary aim. In fairness, there was not a great deal of airborne experience to draw upon in 1943, but Lathbury went on to commit exactly the same errors at Arnhem, where again circumstances conspired to conceal the fact.

Lathbury's Arnhem plan was a slight reworking of an earlier scheme codenamed Comet and envisaged sending the armed Jeeps of the 1st Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron ahead to seize the Arnhem bridge followed by the brigade's three battalions moving along three parallel and widely spaced routes. The 1st Parachute Battalion was allotted the northern route, codenamed Leopard, the 3rd Parachute Battalion was assigned the centre Tiger route, and the 2nd Parachute Battalion was allocated the southern Lion route along the Lower Rhine. This dispersed the

brigade's combat power, ruled out mutual support and obliged each battalion to fight in isolation. The plan thus resembled a peacetime training exercise, an impression reinforced by the objectives selected. These isolated a third of the brigade on high ground north of Arnhem and dispersed a third across the pontoon bridge, the Arnhem rail bridge and the German HQ in the centre of Arnhem, with the remaining third holding the Arnhem road bridge.

Given that most of these tasks required a full battalion at minimum, the plan was a classic case of trying to do too much with too little and virtually guaranteed that the 1st Parachute Brigade's sub-units would be isolated, overwhelmed and defeated in detail.

Once on the ground in Holland, Lathbury exacerbated the flaws in his plan by micromanaging his subordinate commanders to a degree that interfered with their ability to carry out their assigned missions. This began by needlessly holding the battalions at the landing area for over an hour before releasing them despite the time-sensitive nature of the operation and then motoroling between the widely dispersed battalion routes urging the commanders to greater haste.

By early evening Lathbury was running the 3rd Parachute Battalion over the head of its commander near Oosterbeek. He ordered an unnecessary counterattack against elements of Battalion Krafft that fired on the tail of the battalion column as it was moving away from the attackers and then compounded this by ordering the 3rd Battalion to halt in Oosterbeek for the night, presumably to protect Major General Urquhart after he turned up

unescorted at dusk. Lathbury then refused a radio appeal for assistance from his brigade major at the Arnhem road bridge on the grounds that his men were too exhausted to help.

Thereafter he effectively abdicated command by accompanying an equally passive Urquhart in remaining with the 3rd Parachute Battalion until he was wounded and captured while attempting to regain his HQ on 18 September. All this does not necessarily mean Lathbury was an incompetent officer. His inadequate planning was attributable to inexperience and a lack of higher guidance. His micromanaging was presumably due to his formation's disciplinary problems, and abandoning his mission to protect his superior was likely the result of his conditioning as a regular officer.

Nonetheless, it is perhaps instructive to note that the elements of the 1st Parachute Brigade that reached the Arnhem road bridge or fought themselves to destruction trying to reach it did so without Lathbury's direct involvement.

It can therefore be seen that there was more to the failure of the 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem than popular assumptions about landing areas, drop arrangements and enemy action, and that the underlying reasons were poor planning and leadership at the brigade and division level.

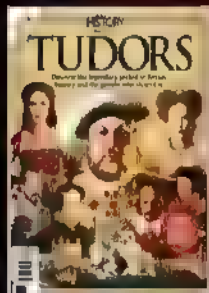
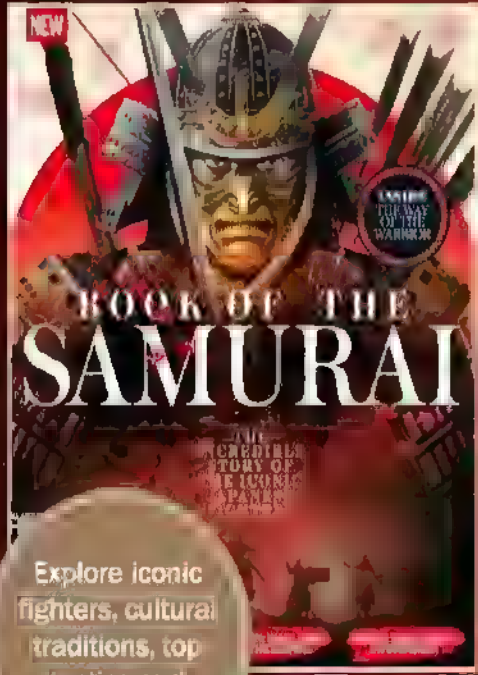
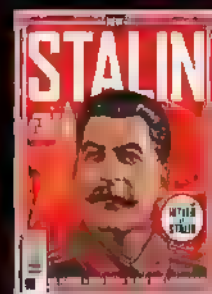
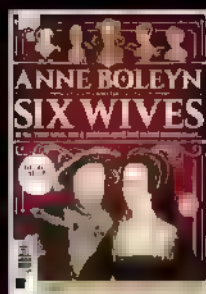
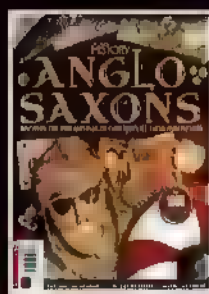
Given the exemplary courage and tenacity exhibited by the men of the 1st Airborne Division in Holland, it is interesting to speculate on how the Arnhem portion of Operation Market Garden might have turned out differently with more experienced hands at the helm. As it was, hundreds of brave men died due to the incompetence of a few.

American troops attempt to free trapped GIs from the wreckage of a crash-landed Waco glider



A British officer is captured in civilian clothes by Waffen-SS soldiers





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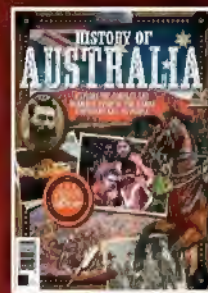
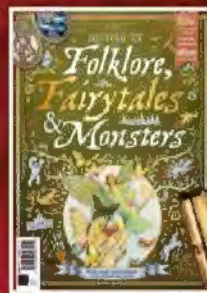
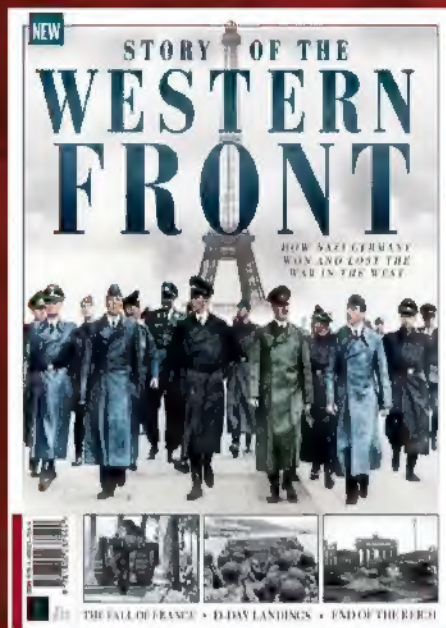


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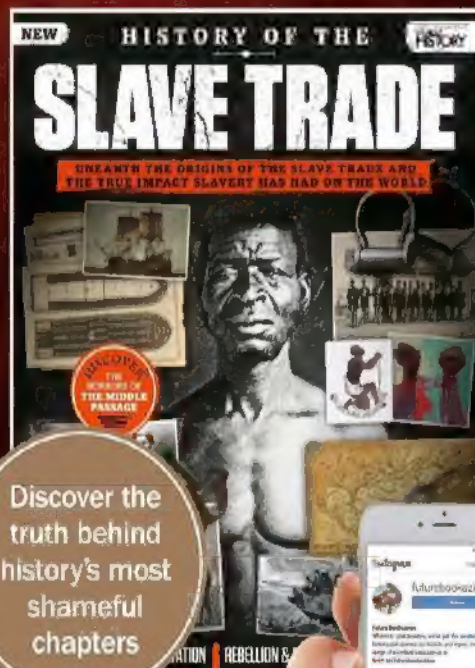
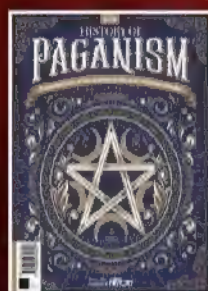
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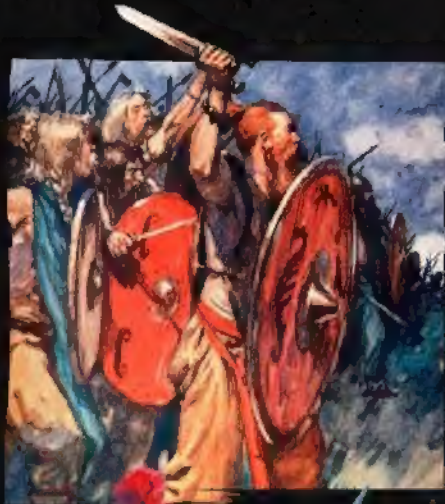


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